

THE
MYSTIC CASTLE;

OR,
ORPHAN HEIR.

A ROMANCE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF THE
WANDERER OF THE ALPS.



IN TWO VOLUMES.



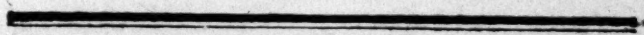
—Murder, though it have no tongue, will speak
With most miraculous organ.—

———Foul deeds will rise,
(Tho' all the earth o'erwhelm them) to mens eyes.

HAMLET.



VOL. I.



LONDON:
PRINTED FOR WILLIAM LANE, AT THE
Minerva-Press,
LEADENHALL-STREET..

M.DCC.XCVL.

17125.65.15
Harvard College Library

Mar. 15, 1921

G F Parkman fund

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THE
MYSTIC CASTLE.

CHAP. I.

“**H**ERE will we pass the night,”
said Sir Bertram, as he approached
the broad moat of a castle, followed
by Gondibert, his 'squire, “the in-
habitants will not refuse us admittance.”

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B

“For

“ For my part,” replied Gondibert, as he surveyed the fabric by the transient moon-beams) “ for my part, sir, I think this castle appears more like the haunt of wizards and ghosts than christians; a sort of companions I am not over fond of associating with, and at any time would prefer the shelter of an oak, to a velvet canopy with such friends.”

“ Peace!” said the Knight, “ and expose your fears when you have reason.”

“ I claim that privilege now,” replied Gondibert, “ and never had I a juster cause:—look on those battlements—what guard bespeaks its inhabitants?—nay, its ruinous aspect precludes the almost possibility of there being any; besides, ’tis not yet midnight,

night, yet cannot I descry one single light break from its chambers; in short, sir, might a poor 'squire advance his advice, it would be, rather to take the sky for our canopy, and the earth for our bed, than venture into what we know not, and——”

“No more!” answered Sir Bertram, “I am resolved; our horses are weary, and we totally ignorant of the road; 'tis better to encounter any mortal danger (for supernatural I dread not) rather than expose ourselves to almost certain ruin, amid the Morasses and wilds of this desolate country; besides Gondibert, I do not insist on your attendance; chuse your own situation; I am resolved to pass the night in this castle.”

“Nay, sir, if that's the case, proceed, I'm for the castle too, tho' I

must confess, I would rather meet his infernal majesty personally by day, than hear the sound of his foot by night."

"Dread nothing Gondibert; the truly brave feel the same tranquillity in all situations; 'tis not the nocturnal shadows, or distempered workings of the heated brain, can shake the resolute; these they despise, and only dread when vice implants a thorn."

"All this is true, sir, and I am sure that you realize it, but as I am neither the most dauntless, nor most immaculate, you must excuse me when I assure you, that I should be as comfortable at the kitchen fire in Bertram Castle, as shivering in the damp room of an old ruin; but on, sir, on, I am ready to follow, and place myself under
your

your Lordship's wing, for if any thing can console me, it is that alone."

With these words they proceeded along the edge of the moat, in order to discover some entrance into the castle; at length they arrived at the great gate, but found their endeavours here equally fruitless, as the Bridge, tho'down, did not facilitate their purpose, the portals being closed and strongly barred. Sir Bertram passed the bridge, in order to find some means of alarming the sentinels of the building, but after a long search, which proved fruitless, conjectured it was uninhabited, which idea was further confirmed as he continued his progress along the moat, and perceived by the moon-beams that the walls, in many

places, had fallen to ruins, and opened large breaches to the internal parts of the Castle.

“ You see, sir,” said Gondibert, “ that a fool can sometimes instruct a wise man, and now must confess, that I was right in saying this old habitation was untenanted.”

“ It may be true,” replied Sir Bertram, “ yet does my resolution hold of investigating it.”

“ Nay, to me that appears impossible, answered Gondibert, “ the moat is a perfect sea, and the gate is secured, how then can we gain admittance ?”

Sir Bertram made no reply, but confiding his horse to his 'squire, descended

ascended on to the ruins, which in many places choaked up the moat, and with some difficulty gained the opposite side, from whence he climbed over the loose fragments, and in a short time perfected an entrance into the court of the castle.

Having thus performed one part of his design, he did not delay in making observations on his situation, by the partial light which the moon afforded, but hastened to the gate in order to perfect the remainder.

He found it barred and fastened as strongly as its decayed state would permit, which was not however sufficient to resist the force of the Knight, who after several efforts burst them open, and

B 4

giving

giving the signal to Gondibert, he quickly joined him, and conducting the horses (not without terror) entered the solitary court.

Sir Bertram had been to take possession of a newly acquired property on the Scottish borders, and was now returning, attended solely by Gondibert, when a sudden storm compelled them to seek the shelter of the forest, and unwilling to submit to the temporary delay, as the shades of evening were not far distant, the Knight determined to continue his journey by chance, thro' the grove, tho' totally ignorant of the Northumbrian wilds: towards the close of the day the tempest subsided, but when he would have returned to the path he had deserted,
found

found himself at once bewildered, and incapable, from his ignorance of the country, to discover it.

In this dilemma, he determined to continue his journey, in hopes of discovering some lonely hamlet, and of consequence a guide, when the increasing darkness augmented his perplexity, and retarded his progress; for some time he was stationary, till the moon arose, not to assist, but discover his solitary situation, as the black clouds of the late tempest still floated along the sky, at intervals interrupting her influence and casting a deep universal gloom over the surrounding prospect.

After

After a short period, he issued from the forest on to a wild and barren moor, abounding in morasses and quagmires, equally dangerous to the benighted traveller, where the foundering of their horses obliged them to dismount and lead them, which they did, when after a laborious and perilous road, they reached the solitary and ruinous castle where they now were.

It was situated in the centre of the moor, and occupied almost the only solid part of it, being surrounded on all sides by a watry marsh, and almost inaccessible to strangers; its appearance was gloomy and desolate, in many parts the walls were decayed, and large chasms yawned into its apartments; of the four towers which flanked the
castle,

om castle, only one was standing, the others
rren having submitted to the hand of time,
ag- and bent beneath its awful and omni-
be- potent sway.

ring
dis- Sir Bertram having thus accom-
did, plished an entrance, began to survey
lous the building, as described, and finding
and no farther difficulties to surmount, led
e. the horses into the arch of the tower,
and proceeded into the hall of the
the castle, to which he readily gained ad-
only mittance, by striding over the pile of
on ruins raised by the fallen porch, and
most forcing the door.
ance

any As they entered, the moon emerged
arge from beneath a dark cloud, and stream-
nts; ing full on the ruin, plainly discovered
the the solitary situation they had chosen;
ttle, the

the roof had long since fallen in, and the effect of the recent tempest floated on the floor, whilst the walls, damp and decayed, afforded the most melancholy prospect.

In this situation it was impossible to remain, and they accordingly proceeded to an opposite door, ascending a broad staircase, which terminated in a long dark gallery, where the moonlight could not penetrate.

“Stop,” said Gondibert, in a palpitating voice, “do you not hear something in the gallery?”

Sir Bertram paused;—it was the wind, as it sighed thro’ the deserted chambers of the solitary castle. This discovery,

and discovery, far from alleviating, increased the terrors of Gondibert, for, tho' it took from him the idea of the personal or immediate danger, cast a deep and impressive awe over his mind, at the knowledge of his desolate situation, and at that moment he would have preferred the company of his most deadly foe, to his own society: to converse he was afraid, as the hollow sound of his own voice reverberated from the long galleries and dreary apartments alarmed him, and to remain silent was much worse, as it left him nothing to muse on but the melancholy place he passed thro'. At length unable to restrain himself, in a low, and almost inarticulate voice, he said, as they entered the passage—

“ My Lord—are you not afraid?”

“ Of

“Of what, good Gondibert?—of thee, or of myself? for as yet I see none else to apprehend any danger from.”

“I do not absolutely mean, sir, the dread of personal danger, for that I am sure you are not—but—but——”

“But of something supernatural;—Is not that it?—Some ghost!”

“Saint Thomas preserve us!” cried the terrified Gondibert; “what’s that I hear?”

“The throbbing of thy own terror,” replied the Knight, coolly, “put thy hand on thy heart, and its tremors will tell thee; but follow me, I feel the door of some apartment, let us enter and prepare for repose.”

So

So saying, he proceeded, followed close by the trembling Gondibert, who feared to do so, yet dared not remain behind. The room they entered into was fully illuminated by the moon, and discovered some miserable remnants of decayed furniture, at the same time that it seemed more habitable than the parts they had already passed, and determined Sir Bertram to spend the remainder of the night there."

"Descend," said he to Gondibert, "and bring hither the provisions from thy horses; this apartment will answer our purpose extremely well, so that having taken some refreshment, we will retire to rest."

"My Lord," answered Gondibert, in evident confusion, "the galleries are dark, and as yet I am not too well acquainted

acquainted with this castle; suppose that we, suppose, I say——

“Hence with this folly!” cried Sir Bertram, interrupting him, in a stern voice, “obey my commands, or—— at these words he layed his hand on his sword, which Gondibert perceiving, hastily retreated to the door, exclaiming——

“Don’t draw, or I am rooted to the spot;—well I am gone;—any death before one from my master’s hand!”

Having said this, he departed, and with terror passed along the gallery to the staircase, starting as the echo of the castle returned the sound of his steps, and had nearly fallen with apprehension, as on entering the lonely hall,

hall, he saw his shadow cast along the pavement by the moon beams, as they shot in trembling rays thro' the casement and chasms of the ruin.

In a short time he reached the tower, where the horses were stationed, and having accomplished his errand, as quickly flew back, winged by apprehension, to the chamber, where Sir Bertram had already collected a quantity of wood, in order to expel the cold by a fire.

If Gondibert was deficient in courage, he was not so in forethought, for having by the assistance of the Knight created a blaze, which dissipated the gloom, and in part his terrors, he produced a quantity of food, which

tho' not delicate, was delicious, from hunger and necessity, to which he added a tolerable sized bottle, saying, as he handed it to his Lord—

“ Confess now, sir, confess that I at least deserve some little credit.”

“ The same good Gondibert,” replied the Knight, with a smile, “ that a child does by being reconciled to its shadow by frequency of observation: thy courage is—”

“ Pardon me sir,” interrupted Gondibert, “ I know my station and its duties better than to meddle with a quality that belongs to my superiors; it is enough for me, if I can contribute to the continuation of it in them; and allow now, sir, that your valour is not a bit diminished by this provender of your humble 'squire?”

“ With

“With respect to *that* part of thy duty,” answered Sir Bertram, “thou hast no equal, and truth being told, it is not the *worst part* of a squire’s calling.”

During this discourse, Gondibert’s fear evidently began to decay, and he could without terror cast his eyes around the chamber; when a sudden and loud noise from the apartments beneath, caused him to drop his bottle, and Sir Bertram to draw his sword; the noise was that of conflict, succeeded by a momentary calm, and a hasty step almost immediately rushed up the stairs, and the door flying open, a youth entered bathed in blood, and retaining in his hand the hilt of a sword, from which the blade seemed

but lately to have been broken: his looks were wild, and his actions frantic; on seeing Sir Bertram standing on the defensive, he hastily cried—

“ If you have a heart to pity, and courage to defend, save me from ruin!”

“ I have both,” “ returned the Knight, “ a heart that can feel another’s woe, and arm that would redress.”

“ Then follow me, and prove your words by deeds.”

So saying, he rushed out of the chamber, followed by Sir Bertram, while Gondibert, tho’ loth to mingle in the fray, yet found timidity predominate over his fear, and with hasty steps pursued them: They descended the staircase, and traversed the hall,
all

all was silent; from thence they proceeded into the court, but with a similar success, no person appeared to oppose them, and the youth casting his anxious eyes around, at length exclaimed—

“ They are fled—but ah! my Lord! who can speak aught of him? perhaps he has fallen, if so, Albert is lost!”

At these words, he stood for some moments wraped in a profound melancholy, which Sir Bertram at length interrupted, by saying—

“ Return we to the chamber; there let us pass the night, and by the morning light, seek some more secure retreat.”

“ This place is not unknown to me, but let us proceed to the apart-

ment, and now when secured from danger, permit me to return these fervent thanks thy generous aid demands, from a heart warmed by gratitude!

"These thanks are not my due," answered the gallant Knight, "my duty merits none."

With these words they returned to the chamber. Gondibert not a little pleased at the acquisition of a new companion, heaped on the remains of Sir Bertram's gleanings, at the same time eyeing the youth with attention, he remarked that he was wounded.

"Not so" answered Albert, "these crimson drops sprang from their ruffian veins, who basely fought my life;" then turning to Sir Bertram, he continued,

tinued, "in me you see an humble domestic, the attendant of the Lord de Mowbray; this morning I set out the sole attendant of his only son, the noble Sir Reginald, on his road to the Scottish borders, on a visit to his kinsman, Lord Donald Douglass, and had reached the skirts of this morass, when from the thicket rushed a band of ruffians, who without parley fought our lives; after a short encounter, Sir Reginald fled, (grant heaven! he may have escaped their sword) and I alone remained to meet their fury: unable to contend against superior force, I likewise fled, and spurred my horse at random over the waste, soon reaching this castle; astonishment siezed me to behold its gates, which twenty years have not

seen opened, extended wide upon their hinges, and I rode forward in hopes to procure an asylum of security, but scarce had dismounted and reached the round hall, when my pursuers entered, and the conflict recommenced, from which I escaped to find assistance from your generous goodness."

"Your narrative is strange," answered Sir Bertram, "and doubtless Sir Reginald has escaped their fury, which I truly hope, he being the son of my most valued friend."

"How!" interrupted Albert,—
"Lord Mowbray the friend of my deliverer? tho' but a menial of his train, the favour you have done me will not want his thanks; then know this castle is the property of my Lord, tho' long since uninhabited, for what
reason

reason is unknown to all but himself; 'tis some twenty years past, his old domestics say, (for tho' since my birth in his family, the time was beyond my remembrance) when first he declared his intention of leaving Mowbray Castle, in order to inhabit one that came to him by his Lady."

"Did he assign no cause?" demanded Sir Bertram.

"None that passed as the true one; he declared his dislike to the situation, and its proximity to the Scottish borders, by which it was exposed to their savage inroads, and accordingly departed: he was the Lord of the property, and it was not the business of his vassals to murmur; however they did not hesitate to declare, that other reasons induced, or rather com-
5 pelled

pelled him to abandon the seat of his ancestors. For some time prior to his leaving the castle, he grew melancholy and thoughtful, absented himself from the converse of his family and friends, finally resolving to fly from Mowbray, which soon after its evacuation, became the reported haunt of supernatural beings, and the terror of the surrounding peasantry."

"Has he never," demanded Sir Bertram, "visited it since that period?"

"Not within my remembrance; tho' according to report, for the first three years he sometimes entered it, tho' always alone, commanding his attendants to remain on the outside of its walls; till one day, after a longer stay than usual, he returned apparently in much perturbation, saying, "that
he

he now took his farewell of Castle Mowbray," at the same time ordering an attendant to secure the gates on the inside, and then descend from the walls; this being perfected, they departed, and since that day never returned: frequently in the chase have we been led past its gates, and as often, impelled by an irresistible curiosity, have I solicited Sir Reginald to enter, (thro' one of the breaches) its solitary chambers; but he doubtless possessed of his father's secret, still obstinately refused, and till this night, its silent haunts have never been violated."

"What you tell me young stranger," answered Sir Bertram, "fills me with extreme surprise;—the Lord Mowbray's character is fair and unblemished;

ed, yet this bespeaks——however 'tis not for us to judge.”

“ 'Tis not,” replied Albert, “ and more than that, to the public report of his fair fame, he adds a private benevolence that to the honour due to his station, joins a love and true affection: he holds his tenants by their hearts, more than fealty or homage, and his domestics feel true liberty in serving him: to *me* he shews peculiar kindness;—“ Be faithful Albert, he will often say—be faithful, and doubt not a reward equal to your deserts: you are my son!—at least a child of affection!”—“ then will he squeeze my hand, and gaze on my face till tears stream from his eyes.”

“ Is it thus with Reginald?” demanded Sir Bertram.

“ To

"To all he is proud and haughty, but to me, more as a brother or companion, than a master: I share his confidence and sports, and if this fatal day has seen him fall beneath the ruffian's sword, would I had shared his death!"

While this discourse lasted, Gondibert, whose care was entirely occupied in devising means to avoid his fears, found none so salutary as slumber, and accordingly, as he now fancied himself in some sort of security, he readily submitted to the morphean wand, and composedly nodded over the waining fire, which began to decline on the hearth.

Sir

Sir Bertram and Albert, too much occupied in conversation, and reflections on the last transaction (not unmingled with solicitude for Sir Reginald) forbore to sleep, and wasted the night, till the early beams of the blushing morn shot thro' the dim casements, which as it gave a greater security, raised a strong and unconquerable curiosity to visit the several parts of the ruin.

“What you have told relative to this castle,” said Sir Bertram, “gives me a great inclination to be more fully acquainted with it: that something mysterious hangs over it, is certain, but whether of common or supernatural creation, is yet to be discovered.”

“My

"My desire," replied Albert, "is not less strong than your's, sir, and while we have the opportunity it may not be improper to gratify it."

So saying, they aroused Gondibert, who rejoiced at once more beholding the invigorating beams of day, with alacrity started up, and prepared to accompany them.

They proceeded along the gallery, viewing the several chambers on either side, but found nothing to attract their attention, as they were totally deserted, the best part of the furniture having been removed, and only that permitted to remain, which was of no value. Finding nothing worthy of notice in the range they were then in, they proceeded

ceeded into a second of similar extent, and equally uninteresting, except, that at the extremity of the gallery, they beheld a small gothic door, this they approached, but found it fast locked on the outside; so that without much difficulty they forced off the fastenings and entered.—If before they regarded the several chambers of the castle without particular attention, the objects this contained froze their blood with horror; it had the remnants of furniture, once splendid, consisting of a bed, a table, and some chairs, but what aroused all their observation was the floor, it was deeply stained with blood, and the walls also; a sword half decayed by the rust of time, lay on a chair, and beneath the table, what seemed to have been a human hand.

Albert

Albert took it from the ground; it was in reality what their imagination suggested; the flesh had rotted from the bone, while the skin still clung to the joints, and appeared of a black hue, while a brilliant ring, tho' dimmed by age and continual damp, still remained on one of the fingers.

The blood of the youth curdled with horror as he surveyed the hand, and removing the ring, he cast it again to the ground, proceeding in his observations, which was next attracted by a pannel in the wainscot, apparently loose; this he hastily removed, and discovered a small recess, in which were some few articles of wearing apparel totally decayed, a small bundle of papers, and a miniature picture of

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a lady;

a lady; her aspect was noble and sweet, tho' clouded by a soft melancholy, which tempered the natural vivacity of her eye.

Albert, after viewing for some time the pleasing resemblance, handed it to the Knight, who almost instantly started back, exclaiming in a voice of horror—

“ Immortal Providence, my sister!”

He then remained for some considerable space, totally absorbed in gazing on it; at length shaking his head, he added in a low accent—

“ All has not been right! let us leave this fatal chamber, too sure the scene of murder, and look forward to that period, perhaps not distant, when
Providence

providence shall will its own discovery!"

So saying, they departed, and closing the door, perceived on the boarding of the gallery, evident marks of blood, which they, without difficulty, traced to the staircase; the track descended, but at the bottom of the steps was lost; in vain did they traverse the hall, no more symptoms were to be seen, and the effects of the late combat were alone visible.

The fractured remains of Albert's sword lay in several parts of the apartment, and what at that moment was deemed an inestimable treasure, a weapon which perhaps had dropt from the

D 2

hand

hand of one of the ruffians, which the darkness had prevented him from regaining, and probably the voices in the chamber above, terrified from a longer search. With pleasure Albert girded it on, and they returned to the room where the remnant of Gondibert's provender lay, in order to take a slight refreshment prior to their departure.

The *valiant* 'squire no longer terrified by the shades of night, and its concomitants, the offspring of weak minds, was not remiss in his duty, but with alacrity prepared the simple repast, at the same time lamenting most feelingly the untoward fate of his bottle, which had not escaped a fracture

ture in its disaster of the preceding night.

Having concluded their provisions, and appetite at the same moment, Sir Bertram once more cast a look on the picture, and while a tear started to his manly eye, thus addressed Albert.

CHAP. II.

“YOUTH, that this is the resemblance of a once loved, and now lamented sister, I have no reason to doubt; her fate has long been hid from knowledge, but this too plainly speaks her sad and melancholy end; while with a sure unerring finger, it
points

points out the base perpetrator of the horrid deed: but listen, and I will inform you of her short story."

"An enmity had long subsisted between the families of Mowbray and Bertram no time could end, or mediation mitigate; in vain was the intervention of friends, they served only to heighten that animosity, which was hereditary and unchangeable, and did not want any of its acrimony during the life of the late Lord de Mowbray and my father: their several vassals were in the continual use of arms, and the separate interests were supported with a fury and savage thirst of revenge, unbecoming the soil of Britain."

“ In support of these furious feuds, did I first draw my infant sword, and under the banners of an enraged father, learned the first rudiments of war. The contending Barons had never seen each other but in hostile combat, point to point, so that not the least connexion subsisted between any, the most remote branches of the families; nay, of such antiquity was their animosity, that I fancy it was almost supported from tradition, the cause being forgotten (to me at least it was, and is perfectly unknown) and the recollection that it once existed, deemed a sufficient reason for continued anger and revenge. The continual theme of my father to his children and vassals was, enmity to de Mowbray, in which he was amply aided, and thus hoped

hoped to transmit with his titles, his fury, and continue a disgraceful carnage to posterity."

"Not less malevolent was his opponent, so that time, which should have allayed, served but to nurse the flame of contention, and add stability to rancour."

"One evening as my sister Gertrude and myself, sat listening with attention to the oft repeated tale of hatred and revenge, which my father loved so much to dwell on, we were suddenly alarmed by the loud and frequent cry of—' Help!—Help!'"

"Sir Bertram, naturally generous and brave, flew to his castle gates,
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attended by his domestics, and arrived just as a youth fell wounded from his horse, over the body of his servant, who had been slain in the encounter: at sight of my father the ruffians fled, and were pursued by his orders, but in vain; they clapped spurs to their horses, and darting into the thicket, soon disappeared among the trees."

"In the mean time the youth was conveyed into the castle, and attended with the utmost care: his wounds tho' dangerous, were not mortal, and suspended animation after a short period returned. At the first dawn of reason, seeing himself among strangers, and watched with the utmost solicitude, he would have expressed his thanks, but speech was denied him, and he could only

only make known his wishes by the grateful glances of his eyes."

"His confinement was long and dangerous, in which my sister and myself were his principal attendants. After some time, I thought that I perceived a visible melancholy steal over the features of my loved Gertrude, and from consequent observation, was not long in discovering that its cause was the wounded youth: indeed he was formed to captivate, adding to the most engaging person, the most winning manners, and seductive sweetness of discourse; no wonder then that the gentle heart of Gertrude owned his sway!"

"Why

“Why my sister,” did I say to her one day, when I found her retired from society, a prey to sighs and anguish, “why this extreme melancholy? you are no longer the sprightly Gertrude, whose vivacity was the charm of every company!—Something sets heavy on your heart, and yet you hide it from a brother, whose only care would be to see you happy! either I have become unworthy of your confidence, or something more deserving it has been discovered.”

“Do not wrong me,” she replied, “you are still dear to me; still the same kind, soothing brother! nor do I deny that a melancholy I cannot surmount, weds me to solitude, but the cause—must ever remain a secret!”

“Not

"Not so much as you imagine, or perhaps would wish, my dear sister," I answered with a laugh, "come, come, you are found out—confess—the young—"

"Stop brother," she hastily said, "spare my blushes—and see himself."

With these words she flew from my sight, and following her advice, I sought the stranger's chamber: on entering, as if prepared for the interview, he held out his hand to me, saying—

"Here end all party feuds; let parents war!—can you embrace an enemy?—take to your arms the son of your most deadly foe, and find a brother in de Mowbray?"

"De

"De Mowbray!" I exclaimed, starting at that hated name.

"Ah!" he continued, "but surely not implicated in a father's errors!—In me you see his eldest son; heir to his titles, but not his hatred:—be we the first to lay the seeds of peace, and still the angry voice of havoc that too long has divided our families!"

"Struck with the candid openness of his manner, in a moment I forgot the inculcated principles of my father, and seizing his proffered hand, I exclaimed—

"Generous youth, enough! I take your noble offer, and from this moment am your friend!"

"And among your warmest," he added, "number Robert de Mowbray!"

"This

"This was the first shock to the contention that so long had existed, and which happily from that moment took root in my heart. He then made me acquainted with his passion for my sister, and demanded my intercession with my father in his behalf."

"Tell him," he said, "that Robert is no abettor of Lord Mowbray's, but blushes that so long an enmity has lasted: tell him, I hold the laurel as a pledge of peace; not only proffer it, but will bleis the kind acceptor! In gentle Gertrude, let us bury all remains of ancient malice!"

"I promised to assist his cause, but with little hopes of success, as I well knew

knew the rooted hatred my father bore his family."

"As well as myself, he had observed, and not without concern, the despondency of my sister; it gave a pang to his soul, at the same time that he suspected de Mowbray as the cause. The youth was totally unknown to him, from the difference of their interest, so that he did not for a moment suspect the guest he so humanely entertained."

"Bertram," said he as I entered, "you were just wished for; I have of late observed your sister's altered manners, they are no longer cheerful and gay, but despondent and melancholy; something unusual preys upon her spirits,

Spirits, and I suspect our guest is not entirely ignorant of the cause."

"Sir," I replied, "it would be ungenerous in him to——"

"Don't mistake me Bertram, we cannot hope to place boundaries to affections; nor is it my inclination; I confess myself prepossessed in favour of this young stranger; his manners are noble, and bespeak the dignity of his descent: speak to thy sister, Bertram, if (as I suspect) he is the cause of this alteration, assure her that should his parentage equal her's, she has my blessing with him."

"Transported at this intelligence, and unlooked for prospect of success, I informed him that his conjectures were just, and that the family of his

guest was by no means inferior to his, and continued thus—

“ Besides, sir, he ardently wishes for your alliance, and by that means gives you a triumph over your enemies.”

“ A triumph! Bertram,” he exclaimed, “ explain?”

“ Yes, sir, a triumph! your foes are humbled, they bend to supplicate, and seek for favours at your hand!—the stranger is—”

“ Who?” demanded my father, with extreme impatience.

“ Robert,” I answered “ de Mowbray’s heir.”

“ De Mowbray!” he exclaimed, as a fiery indignation flashed to his eye, “ de Mowbray! Bertram, leave me!”

“ With

“With these words he started from his seat, and traversed the chamber with long and hasty strides; then turning round and perceiving that I still remained, he stamped with fury on the ground, and pointing to the door I retired.

“Chagrined at the ill success of my embassy, and not less at seeing my hopes dashed at once with disappointment, I was retiring to the apartment of the wounded youth, when my father’s voice recalled me; I instantly returned, and received orders to attend with my sister, to de Mowbray’s chamber; I obeyed, and hastening to prepare her for the event, proceeded to the place of destination, where we had scarce arrived, when the Baron

E 2

entered:

entered: a cool resolute air marked his features, as he approached the youth, thus addressing him—

“The rights of hospitality should still be sacred; there is a double duty reciprocal between the guest and host: say, has there aught been wanting to prove I know the bond?”

“None,” replied de Mowbray, “you have been truly generous and noble!”

“And yet,” answered the Baron, his eye kindling with unusual fury, “and yet, base wretch, *you* could impiously dare to violate those sacred rules, and steal my daughter’s happiness, madly hoping I would bestow her hand upon the man I hate!”

“I thought you great,” de Mowbray coolly replied, “above the petty passions of the world!”

"You shall find me resolute," answered my father, "then turning to the trembling Gertrude, he added—

"And thou mean victim of misguided passion! couldst tamely ponder on thy parent's shame, and barter all his glory for thy whim! but disappointment shall be all thy punishment! De Mowbray—this roof, thy state, protects thee! yet never shall *one roof* contain us, till thou art hence, I am a stranger to my castle!"

"So saying, he caught Gertrude by the arm, and instantly retired; having ordered horses and attendants, without further delay he hastened to a small seat he possessed at no great distance, and there remained while de Mowbray continued at the castle."

E 3

"After

“ After the Baron had quitted the room, the unhappy Robert, remained for some time silent, which he alone interrupted by a sigh; at length as a tear started to his eye, he caught me by the hand, saying—

“ Bertram, I must hence! thy father is an exile from his home; yes, I must hence to solitude and despair!”

“ I did not attempt to dissuade him from his design, and a servant was immediately dispatched to Mowbray Castle for a proper mode of conveyance, which in three days arrived, and he departed, tho’ in so weak and feeble a state, that it seemed to threaten the most melancholy consequences.”

“ As

“As his attendants prepared to leave the gates, he called me to his side, and as he pressed my hand with fervor, with difficulty articulated—

“Adieu my friends! perhaps I might add for ever! and oh! that *for ever* I solely wish, since robbed of every hope in thy loved sister Gertrude!”

“Hope the best,” I replied, “and should a favourable moment occur, remember you have a friend at Bertram Castle!”

“So saying, he waved his hand, the attendants proceeded, and I saw him no more. A servant was immediately dispatched to my father, informing him that de Mowbray was gone; he accordingly returned with

my sister, who had been his companion, and tranquillity once more assumed its sway."

"Some time after this, and when the whole transaction was nearly forgotten by all but Gertrude, who still retained a pensive air, a messenger arrived from Mowbray Castle, bearing a letter from its Lord, which having left, he instantly departed. As my father read it, his eyes shot fire, and passion agitated his whole frame; at length thrusting it into my hand, he exclaimed—

"Read there, the insolence of my enemy!—" I took it, and read the following words—

"It

"It was far from my thoughts, and still farther from my wishes, that any branch of my family should be under any obligation to Sir Bertram; yet, lest he might hope by this to bring about a reconciliation that never shall happen, he takes the opportunity of adjuring the favour by his thanks! here let us end, Sir Bertram has saved his only hope in his eldest son Robert, and is repaid in his stooping to acknowledge it by

De Mowbray!"

"This is an insult undeserved!" I said, as I returned him the injurious letter.

"Ay!" cried my father, as he tore the letter with extreme fury, "but I thank him! an humble conduct might

might have lulled my passion, this gives me back my hatred!"

"From this period nothing material occurred; my father's enmity continued, and de Mowbray's insolence was the daily theme. Gertrude seemed in part to have forgotten the object of her ill placed passion, and I fondly hoped that the lenient hand of time would sooth her mind, and restore that vivacity, the temporary cloud of despondent melancholy had obscured; alas, the idea was vain! at least I was doomed to be for ever ignorant of it: she disappeared from the castle, and never since (notwithstanding our continual inquiries) has she been discovered."

"At

"At first we imagined that de Mowbray was the author of her flight; the event proved the idea false, he still appeared at his father's castle, yet Gertrude was not to be found."

"This shock was too much for the declining years of my father, it preyed on his spirits, and soon bent him to the tomb; nor was our family alone visited by the arm of death, as on the same day Sir Bertram died, the unhappy Robert de Mowbray, fell beneath the knife of the assassin, nor has the perpetrator of so foul a deed, been as yet discovered: his successor was his brother Reginald, the then only son of the old Baron, and wedded to the daughter of Sir William Beauchere."

"Not

"Not long did he linger for the inheritance, as two months after Robert's murder, he died, leaving his large possessions to the present proprietor, who holding the same peaceable intentions as the unfortunate Robert, proffered his friendship to me in liberal and frank terms: I accepted it, and ever since that time (now more than twenty years) a mutual bond of amity has stilled the party feuds, and restored tranquillity to the once adverse factions."

"My unhappy sister has never been heard of, nor even the slightest trace of her could be found, till this eventful moment, which again has roused those sparks which long have lain dormant."

"Nor

“Nor wonder, Albert, why I thus communicate myself to thee—a certain irresistible impulse leads me to it: in thee, did not all circumstances cry out against it—in thee I see her image! thy mysterious birth, and its concomitants—but no, tis a wild idea! when hope or expectation leads us on, we grasp at air to realize a shadow. Unfold those papers, let us survey them, then proceed on our intended journey.”

Albert, obedient to Sir Bertram's commands, untied the bundle of papers; they were almost entirely consumed by damp, and in general perfectly illegible, especially those which were more immediately at the outside; but as he unrolled those more internally

nally situated, they began to trace broken words and sentences: from these however they could collect nothing material, and were preparing to cast them away, when Sir Bertram cast his eyes on one apparently more plain than the rest; he accordingly observed it with some degree of attention, and with difficulty read in detached sentences, the following words—

* * * “ my brother’s
care, he will protect you from danger
—Alas! my beloved Ge * *
debarred the society of her for whom
alone I live * * when
will this enmity subside, and rival wars
no more distract the land? when will
the voice of peace, bid me proclaim
and glory in my love? when * *

Here

Here it became so entirely illegible as to preclude the possibility of decyphering it farther—but encouraged by this success, they proceeded more narrowly to examine them, and accordingly traced on a second, with similar difficulty, the following lines—

* * * “impatience; I
would fly to clasp thee in my arms,
but, alas! necessity, and the dread of
a father’s curse * * *
trust to my brother’s care, I live again
in him, he will protect thee and my
child, my little * * *

They could proceed no farther, and Sir Bertram restoring the papers to Albert, said—

“To

"To an uninterested person, these could convey nothing, to me they bear a world of evidence!—no matter, the hand of time must unveil all—till then I must be silent."

"Something mysterious hangs over this castle," replied Albert, "which as you observe, sir, time alone must unravel: but may I still intrude, and deem it not impertinent; sometimes a thought rises indignant in my swelling breast, and tell me I am not what I seem: the kindness of my Lord—the friendship of Sir Reginald, and now this likeness."

"True Albert," replied the Knight, "I must confess, or my eye much deceives me, that Gertrude's image lives again in thee; but what of that? resemblances create no proof;

let it not dwell upon thy memory; be faithful still unto thy station, and as the Lord de Mowbray well deserves thy love, let not a transient fancy shake thee from thy duty."

Then turning to Gondibert, he added — "prepare our horses, the morning is far wasted—we must proceed."

The obsequious 'squire no sooner received, than he hastened to execute the commands, not only impelled by the necessity of his station, but also by a strong wish to leave a situation which every thing tended to render alarming; so that not without great satisfaction, he flew to perform a task so doubly pleasing.

While Gondibert was thus employed, Sir Bertram, attended by Albert, descended into the court of the castle, and while he surveyed the exterior more accurately by day light, than the transient, and oft clouded moon-beams would permit, he related to the youth, the reason which led him to, and the means by which he had entered the old residence of Mowbray.

Having amply gratified their curiosity, with the ruinous aspect and fallen towers of the building, by a flight of steps they ascended the tottering battlements, to cast their eyes over the surrounding prospect.

It was barren and desolate, affording only the view of a gloomy moor, intersected

intersected here and there by small streams, that crept along over their muddy beds: at a distance, on its skirts, was the forest, from which Sir Reginald and Albert had been attacked by the band of ruffians, and thro' which their road now lay.

From this cheerless view, the voice of Gondibert was not unwelcome, which warned them of their horses being ready; he had, in seeking his own, discovered that one which belonged to Albert. The youth, in flying into the castle hall from his sanguinary pursuers, on the preceding night, being compelled to abandon it, by which means it wandered thro' the courts till the dawn, when Gondibert discovered it.

Thus accommodated at all points, they mounted, and casting a farewell look on the gloomy habitaion, passed the drawbridge, and conducted by Albert, bent their course towards the forest.

CHAP. III.

THEY rode along for some considerable time, each one busied with his own reflection, till at length the Knight broke the silence, by addressing Albert.

“What you have told me, young man, fills my thoughts with wonder,

which is increased by the late attack made on you: the assassins seem to have had other views than those which are the common attendants of prowling ruffians; booty was not their object, but blood, and you seem to have been particularly singled out for slaughter."

"On farther reflection," replied Albert, "I do indeed seem to have been that devoted victim, which heaven reserved to triumph o'er its foes; for now I do remember, that when Sir Reginald fled, none pursued him, but all directed their fury on me, while he who seemed to lead the band, exultingly exclaimed, "*Here is our mark! let him not escape!*"

"Look! look!" cried Gondibert, riding forward, "do you not see an
armed

armed horseman on the edge of the forest?"

They cast their eyes as directed, and Albert instantly said—

"These are they who seek with such determined cruelty, my life; doubtless, conjecturing that I should return by this road, they have lain in ambush to perpetrate their sanguinary designs!"

As he spoke, the horseman, as if discovering them, immediately returned into the wood, and in a short time, four warriors, completely armed, rode from it, and posted themselves in a situation as if premeditating an attack.

F 4

"You

"You see," continued Albert, "that my conjecture was not wrong; and now, Sir Knight, adieu!"

"Adieu!" cried Sir Bertram, with the utmost astonishment.

"Yes!" replied the youth, "you see that my destruction is resolved, then let me singly meet the shock, and sell my life at the dear price of valour; for why should I involve you in my fate, or lead you on to meet a destiny almost inevitable? no! for your good service already shewn, receive my warmest thanks; perhaps, I give them with my final breath, and now farewell!"

"Hold!" cried the Knight, as Albert was clapping spurs to his horse, "tis not in the hour of danger Sir Bertram deserts the friendless"

"And

"And I," added Gondibert, "tho' as little fond of fighting as any person of my profession, yet in *such* a cause, I would wear my sword to the hilt!"

"Then follow me," answered Albert, "we are victorious!"

So saying, they rode forward at full speed, to encounter the enemy; who, on the other hand, not the least dismayed at their determined conduct, advanced with equal rapidity to meet them.

Before the conflict commenced, the leader of the hostile band rode up to Sir Bertram, saying—

"Sir Knight, retire! this," pointing to Albert, "is our victim! resign him to his fate!"

Sir

Sir Bertram did not deign an answer to so base a proposal, but spurring on his horse, immediately attacked him, which the other three observing, sprung forward, and in a body charged the youth, whom they devoted to slaughter.

Gondibert at that moment rushed forward, and singling out his man, rendered the combat more equal, at the same time proving that a good cause, can some times give nerve to the most timid spirit.

Sir Bertram's opponent, possessed both courage and skill, so that he called forth the utmost exertions of the Knight, to ensure a victory, which at length he effected, by striking him

to the ground, just as the gallant Albert had unhorsed one of his competitors, and charged the other with determined violence.

Seeing their leader struck to earth, and one of their band apparently dead, those who still maintained the combat, instantly deserted the fray, and darting into the forest, fled. Gondibert, elate with victory, was the first in the pursuit; but in vain—after a considerable chase, they eluded their designs, and perfected an escape.

Finding all attempts at a capture fruitless, they returned to the scene of action, in order to examine the vanquished, in hopes of gaining by that means, some knowledge of the cause which

which impelled them to seek with such determined malice, the life of Albert: but here they were equally unsuccessful, those whom they fancied unable to proceed, having regained their horses and fled. The road was stained with blood, and without difficulty they could trace it into the forest, where after continuing for a short time in a direction forward, it turned off to the right, and could no more be seen.

They now found every attempt at a discovery baffled, and as their opponents fought in compleat steel, with their beavers down, it was impossible even by conjecture, to form any idea of their persons or motive.

Things

Things being thus situated, and any longer delay needless, they determined to set forward to the Lord de Mowbray's Castle.

"Where," added Albert, "my noble deliverer will receive that thanks his generous protection so amply merits, and I be secure from the farther attacks of my enemies."

Sir Bertram was silent, and they accordingly proceeded with the utmost expedition, soon arriving at the place of their destination, where Albert was received with every possible demonstration of joy, at his so unexpected a return in safety; Sir Reginald having led them to imagine that he had fallen beneath the swords of some maurading Scots,

Scots, who so frequently ravaged the borders of Northumberland.

Albert did not delay inquiring after his Lord, and heard, with real concern, that he was confined to his bed, by a dangerous fall from his horse the preceding day, and that Sir Reginald had gone forth with several domestics, in quest of himself, not doubting but that he should discover him exposed in the forest, where he conjectured he had fallen beneath the sword of assassination.

The youth immediately flew to the chamber of de Mowbray, and after a short time returned to conduct Sir Bertram to his friend: he found him supported in his bed by two domestics;

melts; pale and faint, he could scarcely return thanks to the Knight, for the noble protection he had afforded to Albert.

"He is a child of my adoption, Sir Bertram," he said, "and equally dear to me as my own; any favour shewn to him, is done unto myself; my thanks are therefore too weak to express my gratitude for the assistance you yielded him, at a moment, the danger of which strikes my soul with terror!"

"I merit no thanks," returned the Knight, "he was of my friends household, and had a claim upon my sword."

As

As he spoke these words, the daughters of de Mowbray entered the chamber, and joined in the praises of Sir Bertram's benevolence.

Lady Jane, the elder, was a commanding beauty; the lustre of whose charms absorbed the lesser one's of her timid sister, the blushing Mary: her eye, like the meridian sun, struck at once with irresistible impulse, dazzling by its effulgence, and penetrating by its vigour; while the more gentle looks of Mary, only warmed by the continuance of observation, but did not fail, at length, to leave as fixed a passion in the heart. Albert had been reared with them from infancy; they treated him with the familiarity of a brother,

brother, and were now profuse in their congratulations on his safety.

“Without thy interference, Sir Knight,” said the Lady Jane, “we should have lost the companion of our youth; a loss which, without flattery to the object, would have been severely felt and lamented by the family of de Mowbray.”

Mary sighed, but said nothing, while Sir Bertram, courteously replied—

“I shall at length grow vain, and fancy that I have really performed some act that merits praise; heaven let its merit be what it may, I shall account it always fortunate, since it

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gains me the approbation of the Lady Jane de Mowbray!"

While these compliments passed, the old Lord feeling a desire for slumber, requested Sir Bertram to confide himself to the care of his daughters, to which he readily consented, and with wishes for his speedy recovery, quitted the chamber.

After some short time, and a slight repast, Sir Bertram took his leave of the ladies and departed: Albert attended him to the gate, to whom he said, as he mounted his horse—

"Young man, in the castle of de Mowbray, you are beloved and respected; did I not see it, I could almost

almost wish you with myself; however, still persevere in that conduct, which has gained, and still must continue to you the same pleasing treatment; and should hereafter any misfortune (not incurred by your own errors) assail you, remember, that you have a friend at Bertram Castle."

Albert, at these words, kissed the hand of his generous protector, and as he rode from the gates, found a tear of affection start to his eye, a warm tribute of gratitude to disinterested goodness.

As he was returning to the hall, ruminating with pleasure on the acquisition of Sir Bertram's friendship, an old domestic beckened him to one

side, and in a low voice, begged to know when he might speak a word with him in private?

"With me Hubert?" demanded the youth, "why, at this moment, unless it requires great secrecy."

"Truth is, master Albert," replied the old man, "stone walls have sometimes ears, and as I do not wish to have my words known, or myself observed——"

"Observed Hubert!" cried Albert, "what danger is there in observation? or when did suspicion creep into de Mowbray's Castle?"

"I can't explain now," answered Hubert, "but if you can contrive to slip out into the grove to night, to-
wards

wards midnight, I will disclose to you all I know."

Albert, tho' he did not expect to reap much from Hubert's information, yet being curious to know its import, promised to attend him, and they parted.

In a short time after this discourse, Sir Reginald returned, unattended, from his fruitless inquiry after Albert; with a marked melancholy he related his vain pursuit, but when informed of his safe arrival, he flew to embrace him, and congratulate him on his fortuitous escape; nor was he sparing in his eulogiums on the gallant Sir Bertram, who had thus nobly espoused

his cause, and rendered abortive the daring intents of the unknown assassins.

In mutual good wishes, the time passed till the waning night warned the inhabitants of the castle to repose; each one accordingly prepared to retire, and Albert under that pretext, hastened to perform his promise with Hubert.

The moon shone bright, as he issued from the postern into a small park, which separated the building from the grove, among the close boughs of which, he soon discovered the old man waiting for him with the utmost impatience, and flying to join him, he said—

“ Well

"Well Hubert, I find you are punctual to your appointment, in which you see I am not deficient: but come, unfold to me what cause it is that wears an aspect of such import, and calls for so much secrecy?"

"Perhaps, master Albert," returned the old man, "perhaps, sir, when heard, you may not think it worth the pains; nay, even may deem it impertinent, but——"

"Nay, good Hubert, proceed, and do not think so injuriously of me; let the purport of your story be what it may, your kindness and care, shall receive my warmest thanks!"

"I do not mean, sir, to raise your curiosity by an idle tale, or timid apprehension of my own brain, but to warn you of danger."

“Of danger did you say, Hubert! where does it impend? from whom is it to be dreaded?”

“Pardon me, sir, I am but a poor dependant, and it ill becomes me to recoil from the hand that gives me bread, but still a stronger impulse urges me: before I proceed, promise—”

“I promise any thing! good Hubert, pray go on!”

“I am old, master Albert, and age has taught me experience; youth is volatile, and as ruin hangs on the discovery of my words—swear!”

“I do! I do!” replied the impatient youth, “proceed! this unnecessary delay tortures me!”

“Having heard my words,” answered Hubert, “you will not deem precaution needless; now hear me, I have

have long served the family of de Mowbray, first entering it during the minority of the late Lord."

"Death! Hubert, to the point," exclaimed Albert, with extreme anxiety, "and let your history succeed the mystery!"

"I am old, master," he answered, coolly, "and must claim the privilege of age; time wastes the memory; I must recall past scenes, to speak with certainty: then know, while yet he was a prattling boy, I knew you——Hark! did you hear nothing stir among the trees?"

"Nothing, I pray proceed!"

"Ay, by our Lady! returned Hubert, "I can discern two persons advancing thro' the grove! we are interrupted

interrupted—to-morrow night at this hour—but mark!—beware of——”

Here the near approach of the strangers checked his speech, and he hastily retired, while Albert, tho' raised to the highest pitch of expectation, and prepared for some portentous secret, was forced to submit to necessity, and call in patience to his aid: as he stood deliberating, the intruders approached, and disappointed on one hand, he determined to indemnify himself on the other, by secretly observing their motions, and perhaps, learning the reason of their nocturnal deliberations; with this intent, he retired into the gloomy part of the grove, and as they drew more near, to his astonishment, beheld Sir
Reginald

Reginald in close conference with a person unknown to him.

"I tell thee!" said the son of de Mowbray, "it was my father's weakness; poor timid wretch! he could stab the dam, yet tremble at the offspring in the egg!"

"That work is your's!" replied the unknown, "he does not suspect your intentions, and of course must fall a victim to design; all efforts will not fail—our daggers yet may reach him!"

"Would that mine had rusted in his heart!" exclaimed Sir Reginald, "I shall ne'er know peace till then! Good Montford, see that some plan is laid, make me but——"

Here he sunk his voice so low, that Albert could not collect his words, and after a short time, they separated; the unknown returning into the grove, and Sir Reginald to the castle.

As they departed, Albert sprang from his retreat, and hurrying across the park, was at the postern just as the Knight arrived; on seeing the youth he started, and with surprise, demanded the cause of his nocturnal ramble?"

" Might not I ask the same question?" returned Albert.

" True, my friend," answered Sir Reginald, " and sure a man may sometimes have a cause for solitary walks, best fitted for his own bosom, and honour often imposes silence!

You

You cannot mistake my meaning, Albert?"

"I do not seek to know it," he returned, "for doubtless, both interest and honour——"

"Interest!" rejoined the Knight, "Sir, your words bear something more than common—more than your station!"

"No more, Sir Reginald," cried the youth, "I feel my meanness in its full extent: feel my unworthiness, *my station!* but it was well! you raised me to a knowledge of myself; to bid me fall more deep! fool that I was, not to perceive the distance between the humble dependant Albert, and the proud heir of de Mowbray!"

"Oh, do not wound me!" exclaimed the Knight, "I was too hasty;

hasty; I pray you, pardon me! say, that I walk to mark the moon; to waste an hour; to feel the fanning breeze! I am my wills repository! Pardon me, Albert, and now my friend, good night!"

So saying, he hurried thro' the postern, and retired to his chamber, while the youth, astonished at the wild incoherence of his discourse, slowly followed him, and as he sunk on his bed to find repose, with a sigh demanded of his own perplexed thoughts—"Can this be guilt?"

CHAP.

CHAP. IV.

THE sun had scarce risen, to dispel by the effulgence of his morning rays, the collected vapours of night, when Albert, received a summons to attend the Lord de Mowbray in his chamber: with alacrity he hastened to obey the orders, and found him sitting
up

up in his bed, tho' extremely weak and faint.

"Come hither, Albert," said the old Lord, as he entered, "as yet, I have heard but imperfectly, the narration of thy disaster; let thy own lips report it to me truly?"

The youth obeyed, and seating himself near the bed, gave him a succinct relation of the entire transaction, and concluded at that period, when he entered the ruined castle; as he mentioned the latter part, the countenance of Lord de Mowbray, changed to a deadly paleness, and with a quivering lip, he said—

"Excuse

"Excuse me, Albert, an ardent pain shoots thro' my tortured body! but say, did you not explore its melancholy chambers, impelled by curiosity?"

"No, my Lord," he replied, without hesitation, as not chusing to make known his discoveries, "the exterior was sufficient for me, and precluded any desire of farther investigating it."

"'Twas well done," rejoined Lord de Mowbray, "but Sir Bertram?"

"Was with-held," answered the youth, "by the same cause as myself; he sought but a temporary shelter, and that obtained, his curiosity did not prompt him to explore its silent and long deserted recesses."

Sir Bertram had enjoined the youth to silence and secrecy, adding—

“A day may come, nay, perhaps it is not far distant, when these discoveries may be of moment, then treasure them in privacy, nor by an ill-timed publicity blast our golden hopes!”

This it was, that lead Albert to conceal their search, and tranquillize the mind of his patron, which evidently grew more serene at his words, and at length raising himself, he said—

“Thank heaven! my son, an overruling Providence protected thee from ruin, and us from sorrow; yes, Albert, I confess, it would have torn my

bosom

bosom with an unfeigned grief, for you are dear to me! but no more of that now; tell me, and speak with candour, does there want aught to make thy life more easy?"

"Nothing!" replied Albert, as he pressed the hand of de Mowbray, "Nothing, my Lord! but the want of ability to shew by deeds my gratitude!"

"I took," continued de Mowbray, "I took you an orphan; but no more of that, your generous warmth declares you not ungrateful, and I may hope as far as you have power, that you would now repay me?"

"Point but the means?" exclaimed the youth with ecstacy, "Point but the means, and I will fly to execute!"

De Mowbray was proceeding to communicate his thoughts to him, when a sudden weakness prohibited the design, and compelled him to desist; at the same time Albert retired, and the wounded Lord sunk into a temporary slumber.

The discourse he had just heard, and many concurring circumstances, sunk deep into the mind of the youth, and filled his bosom with ideas of apprehension, till that moment he had been a stranger to: the words of de Mowbray, which at an other time, would have been deemed of little import, now seemed to indicate some awful secret, while Hubert's cautious secrecy, served only to add force to his suspicious thoughts; nor at this moment
were

were the sayings of Reginald forgotten, they rose to his imagination with redoubled energy, and tho' with certainty he could not fix on the object so much execrated, still he could not at intervals help pointing himself out as the devoted victim.

Thus at war with his own soul, he passed on to the grove he had visited the preceding night, and the thoughts that occupied his mind were not the most pleasing: what the danger could be he was unable to determine, and its motive was still more involved in perplexity; with accuracy he retraced every transaction of his life, from the period when reason first dawned, and gave an active impulse to memory; yet did a broad acquittal appear in

every feature. De Mowbray had ever been noble and generous, treating him with the familiarity of a son, and apparently feeling almost the affections of a father.

"Then why," he exclaimed with energy, "then why, at this moment should I suspect him? have twenty years rolled by, and shall I now requite his goodness with suspicion? it wrongs *his* nature, and casts a stain upon *my* *own*; he still is generous, and I will be faithful; it must be so! can the parent of my — No! no, I'll not believe it!"

With these words he proceeded farther into the grove; the unfinished name was that of Mary; it had turned

the

the tenor of his thoughts, and from pondering on danger, called them to the softer ideas of love.

Reared from infancy together, affection sprang with opening reason, and increasing years served but to give stability to its foundation; unused to the cold forms of ceremony, they now confessed as love, what before was only deemed friendship, and without a blush mingled in that genial intercourse of soul, which alone gives the true zest to mutual passion.

Their partiality was unobserved by the inhabitants of the castle, because being accustomed from infancy to behold their preference, they now did

not perceive the true tendency of their actions.

To the Lady Mary, were all the attentions of Albert directed; her manners were more congenial to his own, and as they had grown beneath the same fostering hand, one mind seemed to operate on both: tis true, he admired her sister, but it was with that awe, her superior dignity seemed to claim and command; so that while he acknowledged, he shrunk from the lustre of her charms.

To the mild beauties of the gentle Mary, alone was his soul devoted, and as to one he offered the incense of admiration, to the other he dedicated the warm passions of the heart. It was

was the idea of this dear object, which now solely occupied him, and as he pondered on this more pleasing theme, thus argued with himself—

“ Alas! how am I doomed to be the child of misfortune, and born to encounter ill; a poor dependant, can I hope the Lord de Mowbray so forgetful of his dignity, or so superior to the petty interest of the world, as to give his daughter's hand to the unknown, unhappy Albert? wild chimera! hence! yet, I am not to blame, if nature, acting with my heart, bade me to love! no trust is broken, the blushing Mary owned a mutual flame, awoke with reason and increased with years! yet even there, there am I wretched too! blessed with the passion
of

of the maid, yet hopeless of success!
ah, unhappy Albert!"

Here he was aroused from his reverie by a low murmur of voices at no great distance; on listening with some attention, he found they proceeded from a small dell, near which, unperceived, he could safely approach, and become an auditor of their discourse; he accordingly drew near, and soon distinguished (among several others) the voices of Reginald and Hubert, the former of whom, exclaimed—

"I tell thee, 'tis also my father's wish! I have discoursed with him, and he approves the plan:—why man it cannot fail!"

"Well,

"Well, well," replied an unknown voice; "e'en be it as you shall determine; give us but notice, and at all times we are ready."

"Notice!" rejoined Sir Reginald, "I myself will witness our success, but when we are ripe for action, Hubert shall inform and conduct you."

"Ay, answered Hubert, "nor shall I be easy, till the young thorn is plucked away?"

"Though," continued Sir Reginald, "I could in open day catch him by the throat and stab him, yet I dare not! suspicion, which now whispers only, would then grow loud and troublesome; therefore I act with caution; here break we up, and Montford, see you are ready at the proper season,

remem-

remembering, that Reginald forgets not fidelity!"

As he ceased to speak, they separated, and Albert, unable to fathom their designs, returned pensive and melancholy to the castle: if his former reflections had banished from his mind any idea of immediate danger, the discourse he had overheard, gave it life again, and tho' it did not in direct terms point *him* out as the object of their machinations, yet an irresistible something bade him beware.

As he traversed the court, Reginald entered also, followed by Hubert, but not perceiving the youth, hurried into the hall, who on the other hand, willing that it should be known he was

not

not ignorant of their private meeting, addressed Hubert as he followed the Knight, with "a good morrow."

"Ha! master Albert, is it you?" answered the old man.

"Yes, Hubert; I have been taking a stroll thro' the grove, and would know, perhaps you can satisfy me, *when the young thorn will be plucked away?*"

Hubert started, and gazing on the youth for some time, at length said—

"You have over-heard then?"

"Betray no secrets, old man!" he replied with indifference, "I have heard nothing, at least nothing that concerns me; nor do I seek to know more than I have heard!—good day."

These

These words he accompanied with a severe look, and hastened into the castle, where he received a summons to attend de Mowbray, now roused from his repose.

"Come near me, Albert," said the old Lord, as he entered, "I have been wishing for thee; you have oft professed fidelity and gratitude, I now demand the proof!"

"And I," exclaimed the youth, "am ready to execute and give it!"

"Enough, my son," he replied, "I do not doubt your prompt alacrity, and on two points must now demand obedience: the hand of malice, and the voice of slander, have long been busy with my fame; since first I came
from

from Mowbray Castle; to me they have imputed — but no matter, let that rest; I now would wish to still the murmurs of the vulgar, and pass my few remaining hours of life, calm and un sullied; would sink into an honoured grave, and find the tears of gratitude moisten my cold remains, and hollow the silent tomb; not part existence, loaded with slander, and pursued by foul reproach!”

“ And can I,” exclaimed Albert, “ can I be the happy instrument of procuring them? oh, point me out the means, and my best blood shall purchase your tranquillity!”

“ This generous warmth,” replied de Mowbray, “ already speaks success! then hear me;—Since first I left the ancient habitation of my family,
report

report has not been idle in imputations horrible to nature; true they have not been loud, nor extended to a large circle, but while one tongue repeats aspersions, my spirit cannot rest. My vassals and my own domestics, rob me of my peace, while all my kindness cannot still their whispers, which my power alone suppresses for a moment, hereafter to speak loud, and burst the marble tomb with calumnies. Strange sounds, and horrid sights, are said to alarm the surrounding country from Mowbray castle, which they adduce as the reason for my quitting it, and do not hesitate at asserting—— but to the point: Albert, thou hast been in it, and can confute the idle fancy of weak minds; but that is not all, say, can

can you waste a night in watching its lone chambers?—Your courage—”

“Would deserve no praise,” replied the youth, “if to be tried by such a proof! but what from this my Lord?”

“The hopes of quelling idle rumour, and checking calumny, from thy report.”

“Enough, my Lord!” answered Albert, “I am prepared, and only wait your mandate; if (as I do not think there can be) if aught mysterious clouds thy ancient castle, it shall not long remain unrevealed!”

“Albert, I am satisfied,” replied de Mowbray, “thy friendly care must heal my wounded fame; but that’s not all, I have an inward woe, and time, good Albert, only can allay it;

of that hereafter: now mark me farther; some few days past, thou mayest remember, Lord Wenlock was closetted with me for a considerable time; the purport of his converse, was a union of our families, by marriage of his eldest son with my loved daughter Mary. Albert! are you not well?"

"Proceed, my Lord, 'tis nothing, a sudden qualm, but quickly over!"

"The reason why I thus communicate this information to thee, is to request your aid; I fear compliance will be a task her gentle nature cannot easily brook, and yet the interest of my family must justify a force, should she refuse his hand: trained up from infancy together, you best can break my wishes to her; tell her the honour of

of her house demands it; a parent wills it, and a—”

“ My Lord, replied the youth, with evident agitation, “ my Lord, it is a duty, I—”

“ No words, Albert!” I must not hear the voice of disobedience; see you perform my will, and bend my daughter to avow it! Now leave me; to-morrow you must seek the castle, and ere that, Lord Wenlock awaits an answer.”

“ The youth, accustomed to obedience, did not reply, but bowing, silently retired; his bosom swelling to a painful degree of agitation, which, with difficulty permitted him to conceal the strong emotions of his soul, at the information of Wenlock’s passion.

“ Yet, why,” he cried, as he slowly walked down the gallery from de Mowbray’s chamber, “ yet, why should the knowledge of his love, give me pain? Alas! I can never hope to call the gentle Mary mine; the distance ’twixt our states presents a bar no time or chance can alter!”

As he pronounced these words, Hubert entered the gallery, and making a sign for Albert to follow him, he turned towards the postern, and soon being joined by the youth, they advanced with hasty steps, and entered into the recesses of the grove.

“ Doubtless, sir,” commenced the old man, “ your ideas of me cannot be very favourable? your cool retort
this

this morning, evidently proves it; but do not let the opinion of the moment solely sway; first hear, and then decide. I have long been an inmate of this family, and from the length of servitude, am deemed faithful: I have been the emissary of their acts, not from inclination, but a desire to assist the oppressed."

"I do not question your virtuous principles, good Hubert," replied the youth, "but as I do not conceive how danger points at me—"

"'Tis a false security," he answered hastily, "you are lulled to meet your ruin!"

As the conversation of Hubert at this particular juncture, did not im-

mediately correspond with the feelings of Albert's soul, he peevishly replied—

“ No matter, sir, when danger comes, I trust I shall have fortitude to meet it!”

“ Pardon me,” continued Hubert, “ perhaps I intrude, and am impertinent, but even *that* idea, can not restrain my tongue! I am possessed of secrets, to others totally unknown, and on which your future prospects materially depend. Guilt lies heavy at my heart, and only *one* way can I expiate my crimes!—I have been the accomplice of de Mowbray.”

“ De Mowbray! exclaimed Albert, “ Hubert, beware, nor let a breath of calumny sully a name more dear to me than my own honour!”

My Lord! I speak the truth!" he replied.

My Lord! returned the youth, "old man you wander, and mock the humble Albert!"

Ha! Albert! nay, sir, pardon me; but as I knew your father——

"My father! exclaimed the youth, with the utmost agitation.

"Yes, sir, your father! but 'tis ever our fortune to be haunted by yon evil spirit," pointing to Sir Reginald, who advanced with folded arms from among the trees; "I can no more at present, suspicion is abroad, and caution cannot wake too keenly!—adieu."

He was then preparing to hurry away, when Albert caught his arm, and impatiently demanded—

"Stay Hubert, one moment! when shall we meet again?"

"At eight, on the battlements:" then pointing to Sir Reginald, he added, in a solemn voice, "*Beware of him!*" and immediately departed.

Struck with the discourse of Hubert, and evidently agitated, Albert did not wish to meet the eye of Reginald, and accordingly turned into the shaded side of the grove, and hastened towards the castle.

For the first time, his heart was torn by conflicting passions, and suspicion spread its baleful influence over his soul; the effect of which, a hopeless flame, and successful rival, did not contribute to allay.

"Alas!"

“Alas!” he cried, as he entered the postern gate, “this mansion, once the seat of every joy, to me bodes nought but sorrow! then let me fly it, nor by continuance, perhaps, involve my benefactor’s peace, and blast my own!—Yes, let me fly! but whither? Alas! what door is open to receive the child of misfortune?—unfriended and unknown!—I am distracted!—would I had ne’er been taught suspicion, or known the worst at once!”

He then proceeded into the castle, ruminating on the words of Hubert, and lost in melancholy reverie, when the step of some person in the gallery, recalled him to himself: it was Mary, who advanced to meet him: at sight of her, an involuntary start betrayed his

his emotion, and the recollection of her father's command, stole the colour from his cheek, tho' it at once confirmed his resolution of obedience.

"Are you not well, Albert?" said the gentle maid, as she advanced, "you look pale!"

"My spirits," he replied, "are not as tranquil as I could wish."

"Perhaps," she added, "the perturbation occasioned by your late dangerous, tho' fortunate escape, may be the reason of it? if so, repose alone must be the remedy."

"Alas!" he continued, "I fear it will be inefficacious; my complaint lies on the mind, and I much dread, will mock the hand of time!"

"It

"It must be a weighty cause," she replied, "that can so deeply wound the vivacity of Albert?"

"Would I could make my own breast, the sole repository of the secret; but alas!"

"Albert!" continued Mary, "this fullen and reserved conduct, ill accords with your accustomed frankness; the time has been, when circumspection was not quite so great! but I have done! doubtless you have your reasons, and by this strict observance of them, teach me a lesson, I should long since have practised!"

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "do not think thus unkindly of, or impute that to cautious reserve, my tongue only trembles, and falters to reveal! you know not what passes in my heart; indeed

indeed you do not, or you would pity, not upbraid! yet, tho' the task is hard, I must obey, and bending to the voice of duty——”

“Duty!” she cried, with an indignant blush, “Sir, you owe me none! the word was misapplied; I seek not to penetrate your secrets, and shall henceforth know how to act!”

At these words, she prepared to retire, when Albert catching her hand, exclaimed, as he forcibly detained her——

“Madam, hear me! one moment! till in compliance with your father’s wishes, I speak *his orders*, then fly for ever from your sight!”

“Fly!”

"Fly! Albert," she repeated, in a softened voice, "alas! you cannot mean?"

"I know not," he replied, "indeed, I know not what I mean! and how my future actions will be directed, is still more uncertain; one thing alone is sure—that I am miserable!"

"Albert, you frighten me!" she answered, "what cause can make such an impression, or require so dreadful a preface?"

"Pardon me! madam, I have much need to ask indulgence; but at this moment, find myself inadequate to the task imposed on me; to night on the terrace—might I be indulged?"

"Albert," answered the timid maid, "perhaps prudence may disapprove of my conduct; yet, I cannot resist

resist the impulse which urges me to comply; my curiosity and sympathy, are too prevalent to contend with: at nine expect me on the terrace."

She would have proceeded, when Sir Reginald, by entering the gallery, interrupted their discourse, and Mary hastily retired. Albert was confused, he knew not why, and that which at another time would have been disregarded, now covered his cheeks with the crimson glow of detection: he abruptly turned round, as the Knight drew near, and endeavoured to avoid his observation, when he was suddenly frustrated in his design, by the voice of Sir Reginald, exclaiming—

"Ho! Albert, a word with you."

There

The

The youth turned to him, and he thus continued—

“ So you are going to satisfy my father’s whim, in watching the old walls of Mowbray Castle; tis something odd, that for twenty years his conscience should slumber, to wake now with such unnecessary alarm.”

“ His will,” replied the youth, “ is my law, and I do not feel his goodness to me, an unhappy Orphan! in so small a degree, as to treat his words with disobedience.”

“ Nay,” answered the Knight, “ you do not rightly understand me; I mean, that my father need not feel himself so much hurt, at what is only the idle rumour of discontented hinds and insolent domestics!”

“ There

"There I agree with you," continued Albert, "his fame is too well founded, to dread the calumnies of vulgar tongues, when higher slander could not shake it! however, it is not my part to investigate into his motives, but implicitly to act, convinced that without reason, he would not command."

"Come, come, Albert," returned Sir Reginald, with a smile, "confess there is more concealed than you chuse to make known—does not the reputation of courage?"——

"Nay," cried the youth, "do not put so bad a construction on my obedience; but to convince you no such motive impells me, I am content that you shall share the *danger* and the *glory* of my undertaking."

"Nay,"

"Nay," answered the Knight, "that might be attributed to envy of another's praise, and my toil be blasted with censure, not rewarded with laurels: however, I will participate so far, as to conduct you to its gates, the chambers I leave to your valour; but has not my father mentioned to you Lord Wenlock's proposal?"

"He has," answered Albert, glowing with confusion at the question.

"It is an union," continued Sir Reginald, "that I sincerely hope may take place, both on account of the family, and my sister Mary, but principally for the latter, whose independence and dignity would be ensured by such an alliance."

"I hope," said the youth, "that her inclination may meet the general one."

“That is of little import,” returned the Knight, “policy seldom admits of frivolous objection, and should she hesitate, it would justify compulsion; however, in this point, I think (and indeed hope) she will not be so blind to her family’s welfare, as to reject a splendid alliance, for the gratification of whim, or a girlish folly!”

“I hope not, also,” answered Albert, “your father has commissioned me with the disagreeable task of breaking his designs to her, and will now (with your permission) enter on the subject?”

This subterfuge he made use of, to end a conversation too interesting to his feelings, to render it agreeable; more especially in the manner Sir

Reginald

Reginald treated it, who in answer to his observation, said—

“ I see, Albert, you are my father's hero, but I am sure his confidence is merited, else would he not bestow it.”

The youth bowed a silent answer to the compliment, and they parted.

CHAP. V.

AS Sir Reginald retired, Albert proceeded—not to the chamber of Mary—but his own; there to ruminate on the late discourse of Hubert, and await the appointed hour of meeting.

“ At

"At least," he said, "I shall no longer want the knowledge of myself, or whence I sprung, and if I cannot share a parent's fond embrace, at least with fervour can I breathe their hallowed names, and hail their memory with a tear!"

In similar reflections he passed the tedious moments, and at length with pleasure marked the setting sun roll down on clouds of crimson to the west, and shortly after heard the clock toll out the appointed hour: with hasty steps he hurried along one of the galleries to a small tower, at the angle which opened out on the battlements, and impatiently proceeded to the spot of his appointment. Hubert was not yet come, and he endeavoured to pass
away

away the intermediate time, by observing the surrounding prospect, as it gradually opened to his view.

The sun had been some time sunk beneath the horizon, leaving (as his last refracted ray died in the rising mist) the broad bosom of nature wrapped in the mantle of night; and now the first glimmer of the moon, began to glow o'er the boundaries of the distant landscape, as sailing thro' the clouds of eve, she cast her first pale lustre on the dusky prospect.

As she rose, the floating mist flitted in light shadows before the lambent ray, and a silver vesture stole imperceptibly over the vallies, disclosing by degrees the various objects of nature.

The

The brown rock first reared their rugged fronts to view, as the mild beams trembled on their flinty spires: next the dark forests unveiled their waving foilage, tinted by the effulgence of the radiant orb, and last, the deep sunk vales rose to notice, emerging from the murky shades of darkness, as the moonlight floated over their bosom, till riding sublime in the heavens (all nature swelling to the view) the chaste lamp of the lonely hour, spread its impartial lustre.

In tracing the mild dignity and awful solemnity of the scene, Albert's soul was for a moment lost in admiration, which was rather increased than diminished, by the gentle and melancholy notes of a nightingale, that

K 4

perched

perched in a lofty pine beneath the battlements, first poured a liquid note, as the moon rose, gradually swelling as its beams advanced, and seeming to hail the placid planet with her nocturnal melody.

Grand as the objects were, they had but a transient effect on the mind of the youth; too much occupied with the eventful secret he so ardently expected, he was led from external, to internal meditation, and with impatient steps he strode along the battlements, awaiting the arrival of Hubert; still he came not, and his anxiety arose almost to a painful degree, when the clock tolled *nine*, and recalled to his memory the hour Mary had appointed.

Seeing

Seeing the time elapsed, and Hubert still absent, he struck his forehead in the anguish of his spirit, and exclaimed—

“ Ever more the sport of fortune! why did I learn to doubt, if still I must be doomed to tread its mazes? oh, Hubert! give me back tranquillity, or ease the tormenting perplexities I endure!”

“ Patience and time alone can clear the Mystery!” answered a voice from beneath.

Albert started at the sound, and rushing to the side of the battlements, perceived Hubert himself, who waving his hand to him, in a low voice, said—

“ Hard

“Hard necessity prevented my punctual attendance; deem me suspicious, but not guilty! I can no more at present; the moment is eventful, but rest assured, I watch your interest, and will save.”——

“Point but the danger out!” exclaimed the youth with vehemence, “and I will fly to meet it, by boldness to frustrate, or in noble daring, perish!”

He awaited for an answer, but in vain, Hubert had retired, and he now resolved to seek the terrace, where he had promised to meet the daughter of de Mowbray: the place of rendezvous was a solitary walk, which ran on one side of the small park, enclosed on each side by a thick hedge, and arched over-

over-head, thro' which, as the moon-light streamed, he could perceive the lady (more punctual than himself) already there, and screened from view by a thick veil: on seeing her he hastened forward, and began to apologize for his want of exactness, when she interrupted him, saying—

“Speak low! this private meeting propriety cannot approve, and we may be observed.”

“Here, madam,” answered Albert, “we are retired, and need not fear intrusion.”

“Suspicion,” she add, in a low voice, “is the best foundation of security: but what caused this strange delay? methinks a lover, might have been more punctual!”

“A lover!

“A lover! madam,” replied the youth, “alas! I must for ever yield that title to one more favoured; yes, Mary, a father’s will sanctions another’s love!”

“And can you think,” she added, “a father’s will can change my firm resolves?—but who is he, who arrogantly can, from a parent, claim my undemanded hand?”

“One, whose fortune and merit justify it, and give his wish a sanction; Harcourt, Lord Wenlock’s eldest hope, and heir.”

“And canst thou think, Albert, fortunes, or pomp, can alienate my firm affection? No! on little minds they may have influence, I bear a soul that scorns them!”

“Exalted

"Exalted woman! do not give me a glimpse of felicity to plunge me deeper in despair: alas! you forget my state, my sad dependance, forget that I am the friendless, unhappy——"

"Perjured Albert!" added a gentle voice, from among the trees,

"Gracious heaven!" exclaimed the Lady, "what sound was that?"

"I fancy but the breeze breathing thro' the grove," returned the youth, endeavouring to conceal his emotions at the unfavourable and mysterious words," "but can you," he continued, "indeed! reject the calls of pomp and splendour, to share affection and an humble lot?"

"Can you doubt," she replied, "that love which dawned in infancy, and grew with years? you wrong me,
Albert,

Albert, but I am not so injurious; I can believe, can trust, and to thy vows——”

“Heed them not!” interrupted the voice, “they are false and faithless!”

“Again!” she exclaimed, clinging to the arm of the youth, “did you not hear it then?”

“’Tis but fancy,” he replied, “imagination all, which at this lonely silent hour, works on thy timid mind!” Thus he endeavoured to allay her terrors, tho’ convinced himself, of the cause actually existing, and after a short time, thus continued—

“Lord Wenlock demands thy hand, and thy father sanctions his request; the task was mine to make his inclination known — then can you Mary?”——

“Hear

"Hear me, Albert! my resolutions are already formed; the growth of years, a moment shall not destroy! say then, will you scorn my proffered hand?"

"Scorn!" he cried with rapture, "immortal powers! reject my Mary's love!—but whither do I wander?—I am a wretch! debarred all hope—an outcast!"——

"You are Albert," she answered, "the early object of my youthful passion!"

"But will that plea," he added, "have weight to bend a father's resolution? say, will he take the unknown orphan to his breast, and bless him with thy beauties?—Alas! he will not!"

"Oh,

"Oh, Albert!" she exclaimed, "must I be wretched?—no!—death before splendid misery!—take me, I am thine!—a cottage and affection!"

"Do I hear right?" cried the enraptured youth, for a moment forgetting himself, and falling at her feet, "Can my loved Mary? scorning pomp and pride, accept a lonely cot and warm affection?"

"She can, and thus confesses it!" so saying, she cast up her veil, and Albert springing from the earth, caught in his arms, as the moon shone full on her face, the Lady Jane!

"Mistaken youth!" she cried, casting him from her, and speaking in a voice of unusual severity, "'tis not the grovelling minion of thy love, but one who feels with swelling indignation,

tion, the insult offered to her race! I over-heard, and not without astonishment, the base concession of my sister to thy appointment, and determined to frustrate thy intentions. No more! here end thy insolence and her shame! I will warn her of the impropriety, and forget this thy presumption, that would mingle thy base blood with the proud current that circles thro' de Mowbray's veins! But mark me, rash Albert, it can be forgotten but *once*, the *second* shall be punishment!"

So saying, she darted at him an indignant look, and hastily retired; while he, unable to answer thro' confusion and amazement, stood overwhelmed with conscious detection and shame.

The true cause of the Lady Jane's conduct, was jealousy; that baleful passion, from whose deadly influence no bosom is secure. Reared up with Albert, she had not beheld him with indifference, nor did she suspect the increasing prepossession of her sister, ignorant as she was of her own heart, till overhearing the discourse they had in the gallery, aroused at once those latent sparks of love, which unknown to herself, infancy had sown, and time reared to maturity: she felt an indignation she knew not why, and conceived herself slighted in his evident preference; the first impulse of which was, to fly to de Mowbray, and by disclosing her discovery, draw down on Albert that punishment she supposed he so justly merited: but this
idea,

idea, a little reflection subverted, and convinced her the youth was not so criminal as the first rush of passion suggested to her; however, she determined, if possible, to frustrate the continuance of an affection, she deemed so insulting to herself: proud of descent, and elate with all the haughty charms of profuse nature, she possessed a spirit that ill could brook neglect; more especially, where it regarded the influence of those external perfections, which she so lavishly could boast: this it was, that impelled her on rejecting the first idea, to adopt the stratagem she put in practice, which she decided on from two motives, the one to discover under her assumed form, the extent of his passion for Mary, and the other, on finding, to destroy it.

From the confusion into which her haughty speech had thrown him, Albert was not yet recovered, when a rustling among the leaves attracted his attention: he cast his eyes to the quarter from whence it proceeded, and almost instantly perceived a female figure start from the thicket, and run towards him, pale and trembling; whom he discovered, as she sunk in his arms, to be Mary.

“Alas, Albert!” she exclaimed, with a voice almost suffocated with sighs, “am I then doomed to be unhappy?”

“Ah, madam!” he answered, “you cannot blame?”——

“Blame what?” she replied, “thy constancy and love?—I have beheld my

my sister's craft, and blush for her duplicity!—true to my appointment, as the clock tolled nine, I hastened to the terrace, but to my extreme astonishment, found my place already occupied. Jealousy at first shot its poisonous arrow thro' my soul, and I hastily prepared to retire, when a something more prevalent than indignation, prompted me to lie concealed, and be an eye witness of my own slighted confidence: the event was contrary to my expectation, and while it exposed a sister's shame, confirmed my Albert's constancy!"

"And the voice?" he demanded with eagerness——

"Was mine," she replied, "but I have heard the dreadful secret, and

now must bend the victim to a father's will?"

"Alas, madam? what other prospect dawns? but do not say, *victim*, perhaps——"

"Albert, no more! a certainty of misery (for me at least) follows the union. I know Lord Wenlock's son, the haughty Harcourt, by character alone; tho' frequent at the castle, his manners did but ill accord with my ideas of propriety, and I seldom appeared while he remained; yet have I learned enough to rouse my hatred, and confirm disgust!"

"Do not," cried Albert, "ah! do not tear my soul by words, which but the prospect of compleation drives me to despair!—Great Providence! why am I friendless and unknown? why

should cursed fortune frown upon my hopes, and bar the road to happiness? why, in this hour of trial, cannot these arms afford thee shelter, and ward the storm aside?—but——”

“Hear me! Albert,” she replied, with a firm and steady voice, “Hear me, nor think so poorly of my duty; I have not felt instruction’s soothing beam, so soon in life to cast aside its sway, and while I spurn it from me, forget parental power; no! did kind fortune shower her treasures on thee, I’d scorn the proffered wealth without a father’s sanction!”

“Excellent maid! bright paragon! these words shoot daggers to my soul, yet check my tongue with wonder! fear not, dear Mary! for still the moment gives me that tender name)

fear not! thy virtue and unaffected duty, must gain the care of heaven; you must be happy! whatever is the fate of wretched Albert!"

"Ah, say not happy! true, I may conquer temporary ill, and by a conscious innocence gain resignation, but ne'er can taste the placid sweets of true content!—Albert, I may reject, but never can forget!"

At these words, the emotions of her soul grew too powerful for restraint, and she burst into tears, while the youth seized her trembling hand, and pressing it with fervour to his lips, exclaimed—

"And dost thou weep? shed those precious pearly drops for me?—oh,
dry

dry the sacred source! I am unworthy one single sigh! be thou blessed—for ever happy, nor let the wretched Albert's fate, steal on thy future hours! perhaps, hereafter, my days may smile, and the dark mystery that now involves them dissipate; till then I am a friendless orphan! and——

“The heir of Mowbray!” continued a well known voice, “it was Hubert, who over-hearing the discourse, had now determined to unveil a secret known but to few, and accordingly, as he uttered the words, pushed aside the bushes, and joined them.

His sudden and unexpected appearance, added to the situation they were in, and the delicate susceptible frame of Mary, agitated her to such a degree,

as

as to render a longer stay impossible, so that again the old man was frustrated in his design, and Albert compelled to restrain the impatience of his swelling heart.

“Heir of de Mowbray” he exclaimed, as Hubert drew near, “beware! there is ruin in the words!”

“I would fain speak now,” answered the old man, “but the perturbed and weak state of Lady Mary, precludes that possibility.”

“I am indeed,” continued the trembling maid, “I am unable longer to continue here!” then laying her hand on the arm of Albert, “I pray conduct me to the castle.”

“Stop!” cried Hubert, “one single moment, let not the hasty expression

pression that fell from my lips, transpire; the fate of Albert depends on silence; let then, a prudent secrecy preserve it unknown, till the due time of Providence arrives, that time not distant, which shall unveil a mystery, till then obscured.

“And thou,” continued the youth, “mark at thy peril, this meeting is unknown! we would be private!”

So saying, they slowly proceeded to the postern gate, and entering unobserved, retired to their several chambers.

Mary, fatigued thro’ agitation, more than corporeal lassitude, hastily prepared to seek repose, while as she threw herself on the bed, the mysterious

ous words of Hubert, recured with painful violence on her imagination; "*the orphan Albert, de Mowbray's heir!*" the more she pondered on the idea, the deeper she was involved in perplexity and doubt, till at length overcome with the reflection, she exclaimed—

"Then what am I? perhaps that outcast and unfriended wretch, Albert himself laments, and doomed to bear that sad dependant state, his noble spirit bleeds at feeling."

In similar unpleasant reveries, for a considerable time she tormented her weary thoughts, till nature, unable longer to support the exertion, consigned her to temporary forgetfulness and slumber.

Albert,

Albert, on the other hand, not less interested by the words of Hubert, strode with hasty and disordered steps across his apartment; a thousand conflicting passions warred at once in his bosom; indignation at his dependant situation, renewed affection, and the transient hope of yet possessing his loved Mary, combined with anxiety, and extreme impatience, agitated and convulsed his reflections.

“Am I indeed! de Mowbray’s heir? or did the old man witch me with a syren’s voice?” he exclaimed, “it cannot be! the poor dependant—unknown orphan, heir to these rich domains? the thought is madness!—No—no!—it cannot be!”

He

He then placed his hand on his forehead, and continued to traverse the chamber till the midnight clock warned him to repose; he threw himself on his bed, but sleep, for a considerable time, was banished from his weary eyes, which sought in vain the influence of that gentle power, chased by the various thoughts, as they rushed thro' his imagination, and occupied every idea.

CHAP. VI.

THE sun had scarce darted his golden beams through the casements of the castle, when Albert, already risen was summoned to attend de Mowbray, with whom he remained some considerable time closeted; the subject of their conversation being the intended

intended nuptials of Mary: the youth, ever accustomed to an open and bold frankness, freely made known her avowed dislike to the object of her father's wishes, and even ventured to assist it by his own opinion, when de Mowbray, hastily interrupting him, said—

“ No more! Albert, I cannot hear a word in opposition to my intentions; my resolutions are taken; for this I have reasons which I cannot at present explain, but may hereafter: an union with Lord Wenlock is an object of too much moment to be rejected, and since it meets not with the approbation of Mary's timid spirit, I would have been more satisfied if he had placed his affections on Jane, who, if I can judge of a daughter, would not refuse the splendid

splendid offer; however, there is a cause which renders this of little moment, and makes the proposal, not the person demanded, of material import.—

“ Lord Wenlock comes here to day, I shall myself give him the proper answer, having previously conversed on the subject with Mary; in the mean time, do you make what preparations you may think necessary for your expedition to the castle.”

Albert bowed, and retired in silence, extremely perplexed and agitated with de Mowbray's words, which promised but little hopes of lenity to his loved Mary: as he quited the apartment, Hubert met him, and in a low voice demanded—

"If he had determined upon going to the old castle?"

"Why that question?" replied the youth;

"Because you hasten to your ruin!" answered the old man.

"Ever harping on the theme of danger!" he cried, with indignation, "Hubert I do not dread it, let it come!"

"Let me entreat a moment's attention," he answered, with earnestness, "much depends upon my words!"

So saying, he caught the skirt of his mantle to detain him, which Albert rudely plucked from his hold, and as he turned from him, in an angry voice, exclaimed—

"I am

"I am resolved! and this intrusive care is irksome to me, let it end!"

With these words he hastened from the gallery to his own chamber, in order to prepare for his undertaking, which, tho' at first his native courage looked on as merely a matter of form to gratify the caprice of age, yet now, the frequent, and urgent cautions of Hubert, had taught him to think it possessed more danger than the first view conveyed, though he did not chuse to let him perceive his thoughts on that head.

"Supernatural enemies I do not dread," he cried, as he took his helmet from the pin on which it hung, "'tis mortal ones alone I have to fear; but

M 2

whence

whence can come the storm? no matter, preparation wards half the blow."

These words were interrupted by the entrance of Sir Reginald, who came to bid him prepare, as it might not be improper for him to pass a few of the hours of day in the castle, in order to make some necessary conveniences for the night.

"And in this," he continued, "I intend to assist you myself; — but what!" he added, on seeing him collecting his armour, "do you intend to encounter the spectre of the castle in arms? at this rate you will be an over-match for your enemy."

"I dread not the phantom," replied Albert, "*that* I conceive to be
the

the child of fancy, but perhaps I may chance to find the ærial visitant realized into one more rude, whose nocturnal salutation would not be so grateful, and thus you see I mean to be prepared for the worst."

Sir Reginald commended his caution, and departed to give orders for horses, while the youth having armed himself, proceeded once more to the chamber of de Mowbray, to receive his final orders.

"Go, Albert!" he said, "be cautious, and no e down all; much may depend on your report; I do not credit the voice of rumour that speaks in such mysterious terms of the castle; something may exist to give the idea

M 3

grounds,

grounds, unveil the deception, and—
but no more—Go!—be faithful, and
be fortunate!”

The youth promised to use his
utmost in the undertaking, and retired
to join Sir Reginald, who with four
domestics, among whom was Hubert,
already mounted, awaited him at the
gate.

Seeing them prepared, with alacrity
he sprung into his saddle, and clapping
spurs to their horses, they proceeded
to the Mystic Castle.

After some considerable time, and
when the sun began to slope his down-
ward course, tinging the upper edge
of the low hung clouds with the bright
crimson

crimson of evening, they emerged from the forest on to the gloomy moor, in the centre of which, at a distance, stood the melancholy fabric.

The month was February, and the air extremely chill, when the beams of the sun no longer checked its rigour, as the lingering frost of winter, still predominated towards the close of day, and already had begun to crisp the ground.

As they entered on to the road, which lay across the moor, Albert pointed out to Sir Reginald, the spot of conflict, where the ruffians had been defeated by the united valour of Sir Bertram, Gondibert, and himself; proceeding, as they clapped spurs to their

M 4

horses,

horses, and galloped over the waste, to give him a circumstantial account of the combat, which occupied him till they reached the castle gates.

They were as he had last seen them, extended wide upon their hinges, and readily admitted the whole troop into the court, where they dismounted, and giving their horses into the care of one of the domestic's, the remainder strode over the pile of the ruined porch, and entered the hall.

"Where will you pass the night?" said Sir Reginald.

"In one of the upper apartments," answered Albert.

They

They accordingly proceeded up the staircase, and at the extremity of the long lonely gallery, entered into the chamber Sir Bertram had occupied, and which still bore evident marks of Gondibert's precaution.

"Here" said the youth, "will I take up my abode."

"And here," continued Hubert, laying down a package Albert had not before observed, "we will endeavour to make you as comfortable as the desolate situation will permit; this contains some small matters of refreshment, that may not be disagreeable."

So saying, with an air of authority, he commanded the other servants to collect the fragments of furniture and wood,

wood, which lay scattered about in the several chambers, and producing his implements, he soon raised a cheerful blaze on the hearth, which tended to dissipate, in part, the gloomy aspect of the melancholy apartment.

Albert thanked Hubert for his attentive care, and warning Sir Reginald of the approaching night, attended him to the gate, and waving an adieu with his hand, as they passed the bridge, saw them enter on the dreary moor, and bend their course towards the distant forest.

As the shadows had not yet collected so as to preclude his observations, Albert directed them on the desolate fabric before him, which he now had
more

more time to do than on the morning he quitted it with Sir Bertram.

With astonishment he cast his eyes over the massy walls, and stupendous pile before him, which being erected on the borders of Northumberland, and consequently exposed to the predatory inroad of Scottish ravagers, had been built with a proportionable degree of strength; indeed it seemed well calculated for this latter purpose, being from its inhospitable situation, protected from a long continuance of its assailants, who could by no means procure, in that dreary waste, the sustenance necessary to support a siege, but of short duration, while the castle's strength defied (unless from treachery) a capture by sudden assault.

Indeed,

Indeed, those precautions were essentially necessary for the safety of those who inhabited the borders; for their turbulent neighbours seldom failed, in times of foreign war, or civil dissensions, to commence hostilities by rapine and slaughter; while even disputes between the two kingdoms, were seldom conducted in any other manner than by reprisals and savage retaliation: the Britons levied an army, marching with fire, sword, and rapine thro' the hostile nation, while before their indignant fury, the inhabitants retreated into their wilds and rocky fastnesses, watching the moment of retreat; when issuing at once from their solitary haunts, they hung with vengeance on the rear of the exhausted foe, and breaking in with bold ferocious

ous retaliation on the bordering countries, surprised the castles of the nobility, pillaged the lands of their vassals, and slaughtering with relentless barbarity the inhabitants, retired loaden with spoil into their native fields.

That the residence of de Mowbray, had been evidently erected to obviate those dangers, its situation, and strength declared, while it struck with wonder the admiring eye of Albert.

Having amply satisfied his curiosity, and paused with pleasure on the mouldering ruins of the castle; towers, battlements, and fosse, he returned into his chamber, as the shades of night began to cast their thickening gloom over the face of nature, and having
supplied

supplied his fire with a few more pieces of wood, he prepared to examine the packet which Hubert had brought for him, but first opened one, got ready under his own directions, containing merely a lamp, a small bottle of oil, and a tinder box.

Having procured a light, and drawn a chair and table near to the hearth, he opened Hubert's bundle, and found in it some cold meat, and two flasks of wine, which tho' he had forgot to provide, now that he discovered them, were by no means an ungrateful present.

The sun had compleatly sunk beneath the horizon, and consigned the world to solitude and darkness; not a

sound was heard thro' the immense fabric, while Albert, as he cast his eyes around the spacious chamber, dimly illuminated by the blaze of the fire, and his feeble lamp struggling with the damp air, felt a kind of awe creep over his soul, almost amounting to fear; however, he shook it off, and as he unbraced his helmet, and laid it on the table, thus communed with himself:

“ Does terror become *me*, who have such strong motives for this visit? not only in obedience to Lord de Mowbray's wishes, but in accordance with my own inclination, to investigate more narrowly a situation which something whispers to me is materially connected with my fate? this prompted me to reject the advice of Hubert, and——”

his

His

His reflections were interrupted by a low and continued sound, which spite of his resolution cast a damp over his mind.

Albert was possessed of courage and prudence, yet it was not that species of bravery which defied the impulse of awful solitude; he would shrink from the first impression, but never fly the danger, for which reason he was seldom unprepared for the event.

The sound still continued in a deep solemn murmur; he cast his eyes to the part from whence it issued, and perceived it to be the heavy door of the chamber, which he had not entirely closed, waving on its hinges by the effect of the blast, as it breathed thro' the

the galleries of the castle. A blush suffused the cheek of Albert on discovering the cause of his alarm, and rising hastily from his seat, he closed it, and returning to the chair, perceived a small closet, which opened off from the chamber where he sat; curiosity prompted him to enter it; he accordingly took up his lamp, and passing into it found, that what he supposed to be a closet, proved the landing place to a narrow winding flight of stairs.

The same inclination which led him to the spot, induced him to descend, but he had proceeded not many steps, when a small gothic entrance impeded his progress; this, he opened without much difficulty, and passed thro' it into a long confined passage, much choak-

ed with fragments of the wall, which had fallen in from either side, and disclosed thro' the frequent chasms on one hand, the bleak barren moor, and on the other, what seemed a large solitary chamber; from this he conjectured that the passage ran along the exterior wall, and most probably terminated in some outlet to the court.

In this idea he was however wrong, as after a short continuance in a direct line, a wall impeded his course farther in that direction, and the passage suddenly terminating, he was induced to descend a flight of decayed steps, which ran into a low deserted apartment, which from its possessing no species of furniture, seemed to have been

been neglected even during the time of the castle's being inhabited.

Albert finding nothing in the solitary chamber, either to excite dread, or gratify curiosity, was preparing to return by the same path which had conducted him thither, when a sudden sigh startled, and attracted him; it proceeded from the opposite side of the room, and on investigation, proved to be but the sudden gusts of wind forcing a passage thro' the crevices of a massy door, till then he had not observed, which opened on the inside; he accordingly applied his hand to it with considerable exertion, and forced it open, when advancing a few steps to examine the situation of the place, but without any intention of proceed-

ing farther, when the curreant of air the unclosed door created, almost instantly waved it on its hinges, and it clapped too with a hideous crack, which echoed thro' the waste apartments of the ancient pile.

Confounded at this unexpected accident, he surveyed with chagrine the place he occupied, and discovered it to be a circular tower, most probably winding down into the vaults of the castle, and having no other prospect of regaining his chamber than by some outlet from the subterranean recesses, he without hesitation boldly descended.

As he conjectured, it conducted him into the lower caverns of the building, apparently consisting of many divisions,

all

all equally dreary and damp; the air being so much confined, as almost to extinguish the struggling flame of his lamp, which cast but a pale feeble ray in a narrow circle round the hand that held it.

As he entered this silent and melancholy abode, a deep awe struck on his soul, while he recoiled with an involuntary emotion, which was by no means allayed, as the hollow murmur of the gale, breathing thro' the upper apartments reached his ear, and added force to the gloomy impression of the place.

However, convinced that to return would be fruitless, and that his only expectation of regaining the apartment he had so incautiously quitted, de-

pended on finding some outlet from the vaults, he proceeded with caution, more occupied in searching for the object of his desire, than in examining the place he passed through.

The caverns were all connected by open arched ways, and lay in continuation, thro' which he expeditiously passed, his speed increased by an uneasy impatience, not devoid of fear at finding himself thus apparently interred beneath the ruins of the castle; when a closed door excited his attention, and aroused his hope.

With hasty steps he approached it, and finding it fast locked on the inside, he laid his lamp on the ground at some considerable distance, in order to avoid

the draught of air its sudden opening would create, and attempted to force it with a strength increased by expectation; for some time it resisted his utmost efforts, but at length yielded to the repeated shocks, and admitted him into a spacious vaulted apartment, where to his extreme joy, he beheld a flight of stone steps, much decayed, but evidently leading to the upper part of the castle.

This discovery, as it dispelled the idea of danger, so did it restore his tranquillity, and excite a curiosity before he quitted the solitary regions he stood in, of examining them; with this intent, he cast his eyes around, but from the extreme dampness which checked the effects of light, could

discern nothing at any distance; to obviate this he traversed the chamber, and observed (though he examined with accuracy) only some remnants of old armour, scattered on the paved floor; finding nothing worthy of attention, he was preparing to ascend the steps, when a considerable object attracted his eyes; he approached it, and discovered it to be a large massy box, the lid of which had been nailed down, but time having decayed the wood, he found no difficulty in removing it, which he effected by holding his lamp in one hand, and pulling it up with the other; but scarce had advanced his eye to examine the contents, when a sudden blaze shot from the cavity, and involved him in its ruddy waves, while a wide spread flame burst thro' the entire

entire chamber, in momentary glare, and hissing along the damp walls and roof, suddenly expired, and left him in total darkness, as the light he held in his hand, had been extinguished in the eddy of flame.

It was some considerable time before he could recollect himself sufficiently to reflect in what manner to act, the first impulse of which was to search for the stairs, and instantly retreat from the mysterious chamber, tho' ignorant into what part of the castle they would conduct him; he accordingly directed his steps to that part of the vault where he had observed them, and without much difficulty, discovered and ascended the object of his wishes, forcing open a trap door which ob-

structed

fructed his passage, into what he now beheld with equal surprise and pleasure, to be the hall of the building.

Having thus emerged from the solitary and desolate vaults, he did not stand to deliberate on the past transaction, but recognizing his situation, he hastily closed the trap door, and hurrying up the staircase, regained the chamber where he had determined to pass the night, just time enough to restore his fire (which began to decay on the hearth) with a fresh supply of wood.

Agitated and fatigued, he threw himself into a chair, and had recourse to one of Hubert's flasks, the effect of which, together with his weary state
of

of body and mind, operated so strongly, as to cast the veil of slumber over his lids in spite of every exertion: in vain did he start from his seat, and traverse the chamber in hopes of shaking off the potent power; in vain did he make frequent applications to the wine flask, the first moment of rest restored the unconquerable inclination with added force, and the libations he had taken, served only as an opiate: finding at length all opposition to nature vain, he resigned himself to her influence, reclined his head on the table, and sunk into a deep sleep.

No sooner had forgetfulness of his situation absorbed every sense, than fancy began to exert her sway and crowd his imagination with her visionary

nary train: a loud burst of thunder seemed to shake the castle to its foundation, attended by repeated flashes of lightning, which shooting their sharp rays thro' the casements in continued glare, illuminated with a livid hue the apartment: on a sudden, as a second peal rolled over his head, the roof was cleft in twain, and through the yawning chasm, a martial figure, sheathed in steel, descended.

As he touched the earth, the thunder ceased, and raising his beaver, he presented to the youth a visage furrowed by the hand of time, and marked with the traces of grief: approaching him, he said—

“Albert! my son! awake; the hour of vengeance is arrived! rise, claim

claim thy birth-right! thine is the sword of retribution!"

At these words an angry cloud collected on his brow, and unsheathing a two edged sword, in a loud and terrific voice, he exclaimed—

"I come! now tremble guilt?"—

Then turning a full eye on the youth, he said, in a low, solemn tone—

"Albert! revenge thy father's wrongs!"

So saying, he pointed to the door, at which the thunder again burst in dreadful crack, while the quick lightning played in repeated glare thro' the casements, and the entrance flying open, the warlike figure slowly retired
from

from the chamber, waving his hand for the youth to follow him.

Albert started from his chair, and already had half traversed the room in obedience to the phantom's signs, holding in his hand his sword, which in the first impulse of fancy he had unsheathed; when recollecting himself, and observing the chamber undisturbed, he perceived it to be but the effects of *a dream.*

CHAP.

CHAP. VII.

SCARCE had he calmed his agitated spirits, and again prepared to resign himself to slumber, when the low tread of a foot in the gallery, aroused his caution, and bade him prepare for danger.

Uncertain

Uncertain of its reality, he approached the door, and distinctly heard the tread of some unknown persons pacing the lonely retreat: convinced of the reality, he determined to await their approach with resolution, and soon after heard them repass his apartment, and retire down the gallery.

A profound silence succeeded for some considerable time, and Albert began to doubt the evidence of his senses, which however he was resolved to ascertain, by cautiously exploring the passage: he accordingly drew his sword, and opening the door gently, started back as a sudden ray of light flashed on his eyes, proceeding (as a farther discovery made known) from a lamp

a lamp which stood on the upper railing of the staircase.

From this, though no person appeared, Albert conjectured that he was not the only inhabitant of the solitary castle, which induced him to act with the utmost precaution, as what their intentions might be, he was yet ignorant of.

He had not a long time allowed him to indulge his reflections, and plan the means of future defence against the hour of necessity, when he was aroused to observation by the sound of voices (tho' what the purport of their conversation could be, distance prevented him from learning,) and after a short silence, a majestic figure, compleatly

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armed,

armed, issued from a remote chamber, and advancing to the staircase, took the lamp, and descended.

As the rays, of light died away, Albert, in long and rapid strides followed him, and casting his eyes towards the hall, beheld the unknown surveying it with accurate attention, when on a sudden the lamp was rudely struck from his hand, and the clashing of swords immediately followed.

Albert had scarce time to reflect on this extraordinary transaction, when from the same chamber whence the figure issued, two furious warriors rushed, and regardless of the youth (who had recoiled from his situation) flew

flew down the stairs, and mingled in the fray.

The combat was of short duration, as victory seemed to decide for the aided party, who singly, must have fallen beneath the swords of his assailants, and the exclamation of "*fly! fly!*" followed by the almost immediate sound of horses, passing at full speed over the castle bridge, seemed to indicate a termination to the conflict, which was farther confirmed by the voice of one of the strangers, saying—

"Are you not hurt my friend?"

"No," replied the other, "not so much hurt, as struck with wonder; what this so sudden, and unprovoked

attack could mean, I am at a loss to conjecture!"

"Some free booters," continued the other.

"Or roving Scots," added the third, "their inroads are frequent on the Northumbrian borders."

"I cannot think it either," replied the person first addressed, "their actions did not bespeak a wish for plunder, and their numbers were too few for the object of Scottish irruption; however, we are escaped from the danger, and as our investigations on the subject at present can be but vague, and unsatisfactory conjecture, my curiosity being amply satisfied, suppose we retreat from this inhospitable mansion?"

"Not

"Not so," said the other, "we can have no chance of finding a better shelter this night; would it not then be more advisable to house here, rather than on the bleak moor?"

"I am no stranger," answered the former, "to this country, and will conduct you to a more commodious habitation; besides, is it not most probable, should those ruffians prove Scots, and part of a more numerous body, that they will return better attended, in the hopes of vengeance for their present defeat?—my council is, immediately to retire."

It needed no farther argument; they agreed to his wishes, and hastening from the hall, were soon heard passing

passing over the bridge, while a solemn silence succeeded the short confusion.

Albert, astonished and confounded at the scene he had just witnessed, was irresolute in what manner to act, so as that the result might accord with his courage and personal safety; if he immediately fled from the castle, it would cast the strongest imputation on the former, and to continue in it, seemed fraught with certain ruin, should the vanquished return in order to expiate their disgrace.

However, while his mind was undetermined what measure to adopt, he returned to his chamber, and throwing himself into a chair, pondered on what

he had beheld, and the consequent danger that might ensue.

"If," says he, "I fly from the castle, my assertions will not gain implicit faith, and the desertion will be attributed to the impulse of terror, operating on a weak mind; and should I remain, what better prospect opens to my view, than destruction from the returning foe, who will not fail to search, with accuracy, for those on whom they may wreak their vengeance? on either hand, a similar perplexity distracts my mind, and baffles resolution!"

While he was thus wavering between doubt and determination, he heard his own name repeated in a loud and earnest voice from beneath; startled

bled at this unaccountable circumstance, he listened with attention for its repetition, which after some time again struck on his ear, accompanied with words he could not distinctly understand.

“Ha!” he exclaimed, springing from his seat, and half traversing the chamber, “is this reality, or but the workings of the heated brain?—No matter!—whither friend or foe—I hail the summons, and am resolved to meet it!”

So saying, he rushed furiously to the door, and entering the gallery with a hasty step, again paused for a moment to hear the sound—it had ceased, but with determined soul he hurried to the staircase, and descending to the hall,

hall, perceived by the faint twilight of the moon-beams, as they streamed thro' the chasms of the ruin, the figure of a man striding over the fragments of the fallen porch, into the court.

Prudence now succeeded to desperation, and with a cautious step he followed to the door, with an intent of observing the number of those whom he supposed he had reason to dread; but scarce had reached it, before the same person returned with an evident design of re-entering the hall.

Albert did not wish as yet to encounter his observation, and accordingly retired behind the angle of the wall, where unnoticed, he marked the actions of the stranger; they did not
seem

seem to indicate any thing inimical, for after having again reviewed the situation he was in, his steps were directed to the staircase, which he ascended, and Albert distinctly heard his foot in the chambers above, as he traversed them in search of the unknown object.

The youth was preparing to follow him, being now convinced that he was unattended, when his returning haste prevented him, and he again retired to the concealed angle to continue his observations.

The stranger entered the hall, saying as he traversed it—

“Alas! my search is vain—he is not to be found!”

Then

Then pausing, as if to deliberate what measure to adopt, he suddenly exclaimed—

“Unhappy youth! too surely he has perished, and blasted all my hopes!—oh, Albert!”—

“Behold him here!” he cried, springing from the place of his concealment, and advancing towards Hubert, whose voice he now recognized.

The old man started back with astonishment; but recollecting himself, he caught him in his arms, saying—

“Propitious heaven!—it is indeed himself!—but let us fly!—each moment teems with ruin!—I come to snatch you from the arm of death!”

“How,”

"How, Hubert!" answered the youth, "are we not here secure?"

"It is the lion's den, and formed for slaughter!—the dreadful scene of horrid deeds!—not the wide earth would have bribed me to enter its accursed gates at this lone hour, did not thy safety——"

"My safety Hubert!—explain?—your words are fraught with mystery!"

"But shall not long be so;—at present to deliberate is to die!"

"Then let us hasten to de Mowbray's residence."

"Not for an Empire! that were to break the chain, and fly unto your keeper for security!"

"Alas, Hubert! you know not what you say; if not with Lord de Mowbray,

Mowbray, where shall I look for safety?"

"Pause not on that, the present moment is all we can look to; obtain it free from danger, then will we deliberate on future means!"

"Hubert, I know not what to say!"

"Resolve to fly!—perhaps you doubt my fidelity; but do not, when I tell you I come to share your adverse fortunes, which cannot long remain obscured: but let us hasten from these hated walls; their sight, and recollection of past deeds, even now congeals my blood with horror?"

So saying, he proceeded towards the door, holding the hand of Albert, who confounded, and lost in melancholy perplexity at his words, instinctively

followed him without resistance, and ignorant of his intentions.

They crossed the ruin, and Hubert hastening to the arch of the tower, led round his horse, which Albert perceiving, demanded for his, to which the other replied, shaking his head—

“He is gone; but do not deliberate, we must fly if we would ensure security.”

The youth did not hesitate compliance, but springing into the saddle, was followed by Hubert, who mounting behind him, they issued from the castle gate, and traversed the bridge, as the moon began to set in clouds, consigning the world to impenetrable darkness.

Clapping

Clapping spurs to the steed, Albert was hastening along the road which led to the forest, when Hubert exclaimed—

“This road leads to ruin! we must traverse the moor to avoid our enemies.”

“And perish,” replied the youth, “in the dreary waste!”

“Dread not,” continued Hubert, “better to trust to chance, than blindly rush on sure destruction!—guide to the left hand of the castle, and from the southern wall extends a path, to few but the inhabitants of Mowbray known, it may lead us securely o’er the moor; rely on fortune, and proceed.”

Albert

Albert accordingly obeyed the directions of Hubert, and proceeding along the edge of the moat, soon discovered the road, but so much overgrown with weeds and obscured, as to render its assistance precarious and doubtful.

“ Here,” he remarked to the old man, “ is the path, but hardly perceptible; the utmost danger attends the hazardous journey—for see!—the moon no longer affords us light, and not a star shoots its friendly ray thro’ the dark mantle of night, to guide our wayward fate!”

“ Proceed, and fear not,” answered Hubert, “ a long continuance at Mowbray Castle, rendered all its paths familiar to me, and tho’ this many years I have not traced them, still I
can

can rely so much on my memory, as to ensure a safe passage over the dreary moor."

Albert said no more, but turning his horse to the road, entered on the dangerous waste; for a considerable time they continued to advance in perfect security: the frost had bound in icy fetters, the moist parts of the path, which the sun beams had thawed, and rendered the footing solid and convenient.

The youth was too much involved with the perplexity of his own thoughts, and Hubert too much occupied in observing the road, to interrupt the profound silence by conversation, so that they proceeded lost to each other,

until the horse suddenly stopping, broke the thread of Albert's reflections, and aroused the vigilance of Hubert, who looking forward to observe what had impeded their progress, discovered thro' the gloom, a sheet of water, covered with a thin crust of ice.

"We have gone astray!" he cried, "and wandered from the path, for now I remember, instead of keeping strait forward, we should have turned to the right."

"That," answered Albert, "I was ignorant of, and should have been informed; but had we not better measure back our road, and endeavour to regain the proper one?"

Hubert

Hubert consented, and they accordingly returned, but without success; no traces of a path appeared to direct their melancholy way, and the frequent foundering of the horse, rendered their situation extremely disagreeable and perilous.

It was in vain to endeavour at guiding him; they were totally involved in perplexity, and exposed to imminent danger, at the bleak hour of midnight, on a solitary moor, so that Albert finding every effort fruitless, threw the reins on the horse's neck, and consigned his future course to its sagacity, and the direction of fate.

He did not upbraid Hubert with being the cause of their present mis-

fortune, as he deemed his participation of the danger a sufficient punishment, but relapsing into that oblivion which a contemplation of the past, and a prospect of the future casts over the present, continued his wandering course, almost unconscious of his situation.

CHAP.

CHAP. VIII.

THEY had not long been in this forlorn state, before the increasing difficulties of the place, rendered a continuance on horseback totally impracticable without the utmost hazard; and constant apprehension of falling; they accordingly dismounted, and

Hubert leading him, they endeavoured on foot, to proceed with more security.

“Do you not think,” said Albert, “that it would be more adviseable to remain in one situation, till the returning light of day will enable us, if we cannot proceed, at least to extricate ourselves from the difficulties the darkness obliges us to encounter?”

“I should readily consent to the idea,” returned Hubert, “did I not see it rendered impracticable by the increasing cold, which would make our situation doubly irksome.”

“No matter,” continued Albert, “we but suffer a temporary inconveniency, to enjoy a permanent security, and I am resolved to wander no farther, until such time as the morn can
point

point out some termination to our fruitless labours."

They accordingly halted, but had not remained long in that situation, when the words of Hubert were painfully verified; the cold became (from want of motion) totally insupportable, congealing the stagnant blood in their frozen veins, and compelling them to adopt a prosecution of their journey, however dangerous, in preference to a cruel security.

Despairing of success, yet forced to proceed, they slowly advanced, tho' it was evident, that far from gaining the road they had wandered from, their steps only involved them in new, and more intricate difficulties.

Albert was silent and pensive, but Hubert was loud in execrations on himself, for want of observation and attention, when on a sudden, the horse he led sunk in a quagmire, and frustrated every attempt to extricate him.

"There wanted but this new misfortune," he exclaimed with fury, "to compleat the sum of our mischances!—what angry planet rules to night I know not, but one thing is certain, that its aspect to us is most malign!"

"Patience, good Hubert," answered Albert, "indiscretion has involved us, and prudence must extricate us."

"But the horse?"

"Must remain where he is, since after having used every exertion we cannot

cannot extricate him; but come, to delay is fruitless, and only protracts our fate, whatever it may be."

"If I may augur from the beginning," answered Hubert, "it will not be too fortunate; but—No—yes it is! Master Albert, look yonder, perhaps my old eyes fail me, or methinks I descry a light?"

Albert gazed, and really beheld what the old man pointed out to him.

"Courage Hubert!" he cried, "it is indeed a light, and that not far distant: fortune at last, weary of persecuting us, has at length, according to her fickle custom, turned the balance, and now preponderates in our favour; let us take the opportunity of
her

her smiles, nor let the moment pass unnoticed."

"Ay!" answered Hubert, "I thought we should come to it at last. Not it, how could I be so far astray? many is the time I have crossed this moor of a cold bleak night, and never varied an inch; why sir, I could have trod the road blindfold and not set a foot wrong, so that you must impute our error to mischance, not ignorance."

Albert assured him that he did not impute to him the difficulties they had encountered, and making a final, and fruitless effort to extricate the horse, consigned him to his fate, and proceeded in that direction from which the light shot its rays.

They

They continued to follow the feeble guide as it faintly flashed over the moor, at intervals gleaming full in view, now totally obscured; thus keeping their minds on the restless tortures of suspense and apprehension, until they reached the skirt of the forest, and once more trod with security on firm land.

"At last," cried Hubert, in the exultation and security of the moment, "at last we are safe! now would I give my sword, to have our horse out of the quagmire; softly, master Albert, rest a moment, for truth being told, my old limbs almost desert their duty, and begin to fail me when most wanted."

"Bear

"Bear up yet awhile," answered Albert, still keeping his eye fixed on the trembling light, and proceeding along the edge of the morass, "we have not far to seek assistance: but come, Hubert, now that without opposition, and in perfect ignorance of your motives, I have attended you thus far, seeing that we are in security, disclose to me your reasons for so abruptly leading me from Mowbray Castle?"

"Without refreshment!" replied the old man, "I shall be perfectly unequal to the task; let us therefore first trespass on the hospitality of whoever owns yonder cottage, and then you shall be amply satisfied; besides, sir, we are not yet in that state of security you would think us, nor can-

not

not be until some asylum is discovered; consider, sir, we are wanderers."

"Wanderers!" exclaimed Albert, "true Hubert, I had forgot—but wherefore?—have I a cause to spurn de Mowbray's protection? or with unkindness treat his liberality?"

"Seek not to know it now," answered Hubert, "and the first moment of rest shall lay all open."

The youth was convinced, and remained silent, while the old man slowly followed him, as he hurried forward to the supposed habitation, frequently restraining his impatient speed by appeals to his weary limbs, which began to totter under their burden.

They

They proceeded along, still distant from the object of their pursuit; Albert absorbed in meditations on his future prospects, and Hubert in the hopes of repose, when the youth suddenly turning round, exclaimed—

“ I have thought on it!—a safe asylum from persecution—Sir Bertram!”

“ I was just going to mention the same person,” interrupted Hubert, “ and am glad to find your ideas and mine correspond.”

“ Ay!” answered Albert, “ but remember that my reception depends on your report; his last words to me on mounting his steed, was a promise of protection in the moment of misfortune, if not incurred by my own misconduct;—now I should—”

“ Throw

"Throw in no doubts!" cried Hubert with alacrity, "but since that's the case, rest assured of a chamber in his castle; my information is of import to himself, and may procure us a welcome."

He would have proceeded, but was interrupted by their arrival at the wished for habitation, which they discovered (instead of an humble hamlet) to be the remains of an old fortification, long deserted by its warlike tenants, and situated on the verge of the morass: its towers were all levelled with the dust, and the wall in ruins, filled up the fosse, while but a few of the ancient chambers, seemed to have resisted the hand of time.

The

The light they had observed, streamed from an upper window, and a loud burst of laughter appeared to issue from the same situation.

The pillars of the great entrance no longer supported their massy portals, but scattered in ruins thro' the court, afforded an easy passage, alone impeded by the frequent fragments of the decayed fabric, which thro' the deep gloom and solitary situation, cast an insurmountable awe over the mind of each beholder.

To deliberate was not the intention of Albert, so that with hasty strides he approached that part of the building which appeared once to have given entrance to its ancient hall, and soon discovered

discovered a door, fast closed, at which depended a small horn; he applied it to his lips, and sounding a shrill blast, soon heard the footsteps of some person descending, and in a short time after, a voice from within demanded, "who asked admittance?"

"Two weary strangers," replied the youth, "who led by the rays of the light, and encouraged by the voice of hilarity, beg permission for a few hours to intrude on your hospitality?"

"You are welcome," said the same person, and immediately pushing back the bolts of the door, admitted them into the hall.

"You are welcome, and just in time to partake of a slight refreshment, prepared for some benighted strangers

like yourselves, who are not a long time housed, and have drained but a single bottle: our old habitation affords little, yet that we freely give; let me conduct you."

So saying, he traversed the hall, and was followed in silence by the weary travellers, who, after ascending an old decayed staircase, were introduced into a large chamber, where a considerable number of men were seated at a table, enjoying themselves over the wine flask.

On seeing them enter, they immediately arose to receive them, and Albert recognized in the person of a warrior, who occupied a place near to the hearth, where blazed a cheerful fire,

fire, the armed figure which had been so rudely attacked in Mowbray Castle.

After a short time, the refreshments were produced, and done ample honour to by the whole party, accompanied by frequent libations and boisterous bursts of merriment, while during the repast, Albert eyed with marked attention his companions, and discovered in their features and manners, a fierce bluntness and savage ferocity, which was not diminished by the enigmatic hints they seemed to throw out to each other, as the wine began to operate.

The warrior whom he had recognized, during the meal remained silent and reserved, seeming to note the words and actions of his entertainers

with a scrupulous exactitude, which excited the astonishment of Albert, and aroused in his bosom a similar attention, not unmingled with fear.

"Yet why, he thought, should I dread? is it their liberality should create suspicion? away with it!—'tis ignoble and ungenerous!"

Thus did he argue with himself, and endeavoured, tho' in vain, to shake off that apprehension the mysterious air of the unknown created.

Their repast being ended, one of the company, who seemed to have some small degree of authority, remarked—

"That

"That unless they intended to await the dawn over their cups, they must retire to rest, as it was far past midnight."

To this they immediately agreed, and turning to an attendant, he continued—

"Conduct the strangers to their chambers. Our old habitation affords but poor conveniencies, and a small choice; however, such as it is, you are freely welcome to."

They returned him suitable thanks for his marked civility, and were conducted from the chamber into a long gallery, from which ran several apartments, into one of which, immediately next to the one they had quitted,

Albert and Hubert were placed, while at a small distance farther, the unknown, and his attendants, were con- signed to repose.

Hubert, as the conductor departed, began to survey the chamber they were permitted to occupy, and observed, not without alarm, that the door could not by any means be fastened, so as to prevent, if there was a probability of danger, its sudden attack.

"No matter," said Albert, as he communicated the discovery to him, "I do not propose to disarm, and shall therefore be prepared to meet whatever may be the event."

In

In every other respect the apartment was sufficiently commodious, containing tables, chairs, and a bed, which in their weary state seemed to provoke repose, but scarce had they finished their scrutiny, when a gentle tap at the door excited their attention; it was repeated, and on receiving permission, the unknown warrior entered.

"Pardon this intrusion," he said, advancing into the chamber "but perhaps, you will be the more willing to grant it, when you have heard my motive, which is our common safety; I do not like the appearance of our entertainers."

"Sir, you speak my mind," replied Albert."

Q4

"Hift!"

"Hift!" cried Hubert, in a low voice, from a distant corner of the room, "without farther words you may amply satisfy your doubts, thro' a chink which communicates with their apartment."

Albert advanced to where the old man stood, and plainly discovered a cleft in the wall, thro' which they could not only discern all that passed, but distinctly hear the most minute expression.

"This may destroy, or confirm our ideas," said the youth.

"Let us be silent," replied the warrior.

They

They accordingly listened with the utmost attention, and clearly collected each word that dropped in the other chamber.

"It was wrong to admit the two last," said one of the party.

"How was I to know that?" replied another.

"Their appearance might have told you so; they can yield no plunder, and will only be an addition of force to the rest."

"That shan't be the case, they are weary, and soon will sink to slumber—a dagger then can silence them!"

"Why not," cried a hoarse voice, "do the same to all? 'twill be the surest method, and freest from danger."

"No," answered the person who had first spoken, "that must not be,
I do

I do not like throat cutting in cold blood, they must not die unless they resist!"

"And after all," observed another, "I fancy we shall get little more for our pains, than perhaps a few wounds, and the merit of their deaths."

"Ha! ha! cried the villain who proposed the murder, "when didst thou grow penitent?—come, come, reform, and like other great men, out of thy ill gotten wealth found a monastery, and pay for absolution!—what, I'll warrant thou wilt not partake of to night's plunder?"

"No jeering!" cried the person who seemed to command the party, "we have more serious work to perform.—Richard," he continued, turning to one of the robbers, "you guard the door to night:—now each

one to his apartment, and silence, till the time of action; when you suppose they are sunk in slumber, Richard do you remove their arms, and give us notice; they cannot thus escape us."

So saying, he proceeded to the gallery, followed by the remainder of the party, while Richard taking a lamp, proceeded to take up his station in the hall.

"You see," said Albert, addressing the stranger, "that our suspicions have not been without foundation."

"And our resolutions must be prompt," he answered, then pausing a moment, until the bustle in the gallery had subsided, he silently returned to his companions.

After

After a short absence, he again appeared, attended by his two friends, who had so fortunately contributed to his defence in Mowbray Castle, and began to deliberate on what plan (if pursued) would most tend to their united safety.

After some reflection, it was determined patiently to await the time when Richard should (deeming them lost in sleep) come to remove their arms, and seizing him in silence, thro' his means to obtain a passage from the ruin.

This appeared the most feasible and secure method they could adopt in the hasty moment of danger, and they accordingly (not without anxiety) expected his arrival, which was not long
2 delayed,

delayed, as they soon heard his foot on the stairs, and immediately extinguished the lamp, and crowding to the door in silence, prepared with resolution to perfect their design.

As he approached the door of their chamber, he stood for a moment to hear if yet they slumbered, when discovering no sound, and conceiving the prey caught in the toils, he gently opened the entrance, where his ideas were confirmed by the total darkness that prevailed; he accordingly advanced, and on the motion, was struck to the earth, and his mouth instantly covered with a bandage, so as perfectly to preclude the possibility of his giving the slightest alarm to his fellows.

Seeing

Seeing their plan thus far fortunate, the warlike stranger seized the ruffian's hand with a determined grasp, and forcibly led him into the outer chamber, attended by the companions of his bold undertaking.

He there in a firm and resolute tone, commanded him to conduct them to the gate of the building, to which the other readily complied, finding all hopes of aid vain, and a refusal certain death.

They proceeded down the staircase, bearing the lamp, which thro' precaution he had left on a table as he approached their room, lest its sudden rays might arouse his expected victims, but on entering the decayed hall, instead of bending their steps towards
the

the closed portal, they followed the reluctant robber thro' a small gothic door, which opened into a dark passage, terminating in a spiral flight of steps.

Down these they hastily descended, and soon reached a dismal vault, evidently formed by art, from which ran a gloomy arched path, damp and melancholy; thro' it however they were conducted, and after a considerable time, arrived at what appeared to be a cleft in some rock, affording a passage by means of a few steps, hewn out in a rough manner: up these they hastened, and issuing from the aperture, discovered themselves at the foot of a steep rocky eminence, surrounded by a thick gloomy forest.

Having

Having proceeded thus far, and perfected an escape, they checked their vengeance, which they had determined to gratify on their atrocious conductor, in consideration of the service he had rendered them; still continued the bandage over his mouth, and binding his arms to prevent a pursuit, extinguished his lamp, and permitted him to descend thro' the passage, and return to his fellows.

Ignorant of the situation they were in, and surrounded by the thick shades of night, their first precaution was, to quit the mouth of the cavern, and proceeding with slow steps thro' the forest, they awaited with patience the dawn, which at that time was not far distant.

END OF VOL. I.